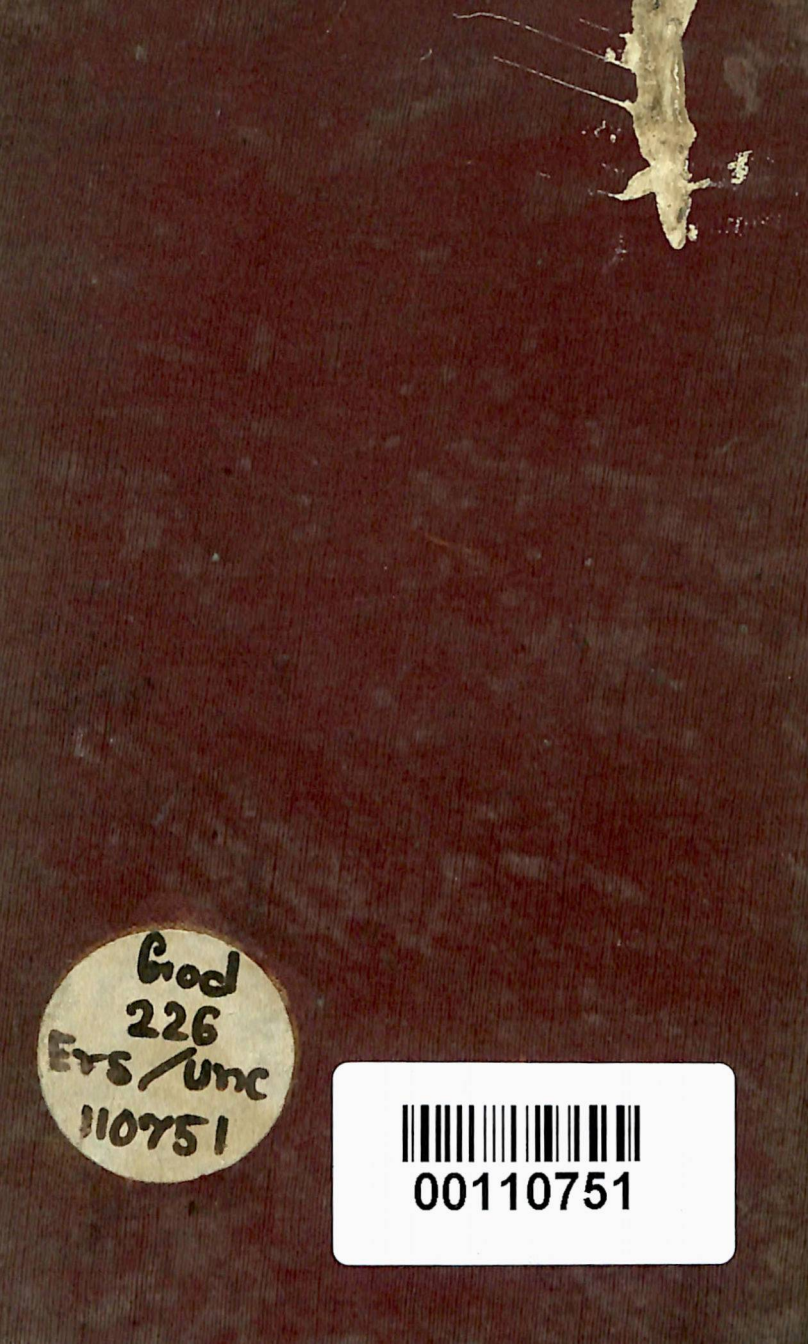
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THE

CONDITIONAL FREENESS

OF

THE GOSPEL

110751

BY THOMAS ERSKINE

OF LINLATHEN.

New Edition, Revised under the Superintendence of the Author.

EDINBURGH

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1870.

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NOTE.

THE lamented author of this valuable work had long refused to permit its republication, on the ground that it no longer adequately represented his thoughts on the subject.

At last, however, yielding to repeated solicitation, he was induced to listen to its reperusal, and became satisfied as to the substantial harmony between his later thoughts and the teaching which is embodied in its pages.

Although unable from physical weakness to take any active part in the revision, it was with his entire and intelligent sanction that those passages have been omitted

which had reference to forms of erroneous doctrine no longer prominent in the teaching of the day; and the few actual changes which have been made, were either dictated by himself, or cordially approved of by him.

May 20, 1870.

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INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

Difficulties as to the Freedom of the Gospel.

WHEN we tell a man that salvation is perfectly gratuitous, whilst, at the same time, we tell him that unless he believes the gospel he cannot be saved, we appear to him to be saying *free* and *unfree* with one breath. And we increase his difficulties extremely when we add, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The gratuitousness of the salvation seems altogether to vanish in the presence of these high and weighty conditions. And yet, if faith and holiness are not appended as conditions of salvation, where is their place in the Christian system? If Christian doctrine is not believed, it can be of no use; and if Christian faith does not produce Christian holiness, it can be of no use either. Are not faith and holiness then conditions

Apparent contradictions.

of salvation? And if there are any conditions of salvation, where is its gratuitousness?

I am well aware that there are many Christians who do not perceive these difficulties at all, and who of course are not disquieted by them. The object of their contemplation is not a theological system, but the great Being whose nature and relation to us form the theme of theology,—and their delight is not in the logical coherence of their theory, but in spiritual communion with Him. Such persons are indeed blessed, —and instead of presuming to teach them, I desire to learn from them. But there are persons of a very different description. There are many who are kept at a distance from Christianity altogether by these apparent contradictions; and there are even many real Christians who have suffered much perplexity from them. To such believers and unbelievers, I humbly offer the solution which has satisfied myself.

I think that much of the theoretical difficulty on this matter has arisen from the habit of considering salvation and condemnation merely as future; and this again arises from considering them as outside of ourselves, as dependent on a sen-

tence of God concerning us, rather than as consisting in very deed in the state of our own being. Now, the Bible tells us that the kingdom of heaven is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," and it describes the future happiness as consisting in likeness to Christ: "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." We are told that it shall be said on the last day to those on the right hand, "Enter into the joy of your Lord." This shows that their joy is to be of the same nature as their Lord's. His joy on earth was to do the will of his Father,—it was his meat, as he himself expresses it;—and, now in heaven, his satisfaction consists in "seeing of the travail of his soul;" that is, in seeing the advancement and accomplishment of the objects for which he came into the world. Those who enter into this joy, must also enter into the Saviour's likeness,—for only holy and loving beings could enjoy this joy. Salvation therefore cannot be a thing of place or time; in its essence it must be the same here and hereafter; and it follows that the idea of having heaven without holiness, is like the idea of having health without being well,—it is a contradiction in terms.

The disease of the soul, and its medicine.

Christianity may be considered as a divinely revealed system of medical treatment for diseased spirits. Heaven is the name for health in the soul, and hell is the name for disease; and the design of Christianity is to produce heaven, and to destroy hell.

But what is the meaning of *pardon*, unless there are rewards and punishments? Does not the very idea of pardon suppose the existence of law and condemnation? Yes, but the deliverance from condemnation, which we call pardon, may be understood in two senses. It may be regarded as the removal of a penalty arbitrarily inflicted by a judge who views the transgression and pronounces sentence against it merely in reference to its deserts, or as the revelation of a fatherly love which survives our sin, and which will not cease to seek the deliverance of the sinner from sin, till, by the awakening of filial trust in the sinner's heart, the end is attained.

Those, therefore, who maintain the gratuitousness and universality of pardon, do not at all suppose that God is indifferent to right and wrong in His creatures,—for they regard the pardon as the spiritual medicine for the removal of sin.

When the apostle proclaims, as the substance of his gospel, "Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins," he adds, "And by him all who believe are *justified* from all things;" that is, they are set right with God by faith in His forgiving love thus proclaimed. Being justified freely by His grace, they have peace with Him,—past sin is no longer a barrier,—they can trust His purposes concerning them, and are thus set free to love Him.

Suppose a man were relieved from all judicial infliction, whilst the disease of his soul remained unchanged,—would he be happy? Does the misery of man, at this hour, arise simply from death and pain and absence from Eden? Would a healthy immortality, in a beautiful garden, make him happy? Would the presence of God make him happy? Alas! life itself, even abstracted from pain or sickness, is often a heavy burden,—and the presence of the holy God, far from being sought as a blessing, would be shunned as a curse by an unholy being.

No. The misery of man does not arise

merely from positive infliction, and could not be relieved by the mere removal of judicial penalties.

What is the misery of man? It is that his mind is diseased. He was made to regard and enjoy God as his chief object; and his faculties will not work healthfully in the absence of this object. But he has left God, and wearies himself in seeking good from created things. The love of God is to the human spirit what the key-stone is to the arch; ruin is the consequence when it falls from its place. And thus, we see that man's reason bewilders him, and his conscience harasses him,—his imagination deceives and disquiets him,—his passions and affections agitate and torture him. He has a misery wrought into the very elements of his being, independent altogether of positive infliction. This misery is rarely felt in all its force here; sometimes, in consequence of the occupation and distraction which the mind finds in external things, it is scarcely felt at all; but when these are removed, the unhappiness is felt. Hence the horror of solitary confinement, without the means of occupation. Hence, also, the misery of the spirit is sometimes even alleviated by exter-

nal inflictions, because they draw its attention from itself.

When I can lay the blame of my misery on anything external to me, there may be hope of deliverance, for I can distinguish between myself and my sorrow. But it is a terrific discovery to make, that I am myself my own misery. I had supposed the source of the evil to be elsewhere, and retreated, as I thought, within myself. But the more I retreated in that direction, the more intense and intolerable the heat became. My own mind was the furnace. This is indeed appalling, for how am I to escape from myself?

But how, it may be asked, is pardon to cure this misery? We can understand how pardon might remove an *external infliction*, but how can it remove this *internal disease?*

I answer: The great cause of the disorder and misery which distract the human mind is *averseness or indifference to God.* The love of God, the key-stone of the arch, is fallen from its place, and all has, in consequence, gone to wreck. The sense of sin continually increases this averseness of the heart from God, because pollution hates and shrinks from holiness, and an accusing conscience dreads avenging justice. The only

cure for this dreadful and wide-spreading disorder, must therefore be something which will replace the key-stone in the arch,—something which will rekindle love towards God, by taking away fear and inspiring confidence.

Now, the manifestation of the character of God contained in the gift of Christ is exactly fitted for this purpose. It is not a mere deliverance from penalties. Indeed, the penalties are not cancelled—death still remains, and man toils and sweats still on the outside of Eden. The forgiveness of the gospel meets the penalties of the law, not by cancelling them, but by associating them with the purpose of a loving Father to deliver from sin, instead of a purpose of mere retribution. Death remains, but there is the promise of new and endless life beyond the grave. Eden is still barred and man still eats his bread at the price of labour; but the access into the real presence of God is thrown open; all are invited and urged to come in. He hath loved us, and given *Himself* for us. The medicinal virtue of the gospel—the virtue which heals the disease of the soul, which destroys enmity and enkindles holy love, which does away

the cowardly fear of punishment, and at the same time implants and strengthens the holy fear of sinning,—the medicinal virtue which effects this lies in the manifestation of that love of God which passeth knowledge, that holy love with which God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son for it.

Love is the great principle developed in the gospel, which reveals the union of an infinite abhorrence towards sin, and an infinite love towards the sinner. This mysterious history is the mighty instrument with which the Spirit of God breaks the power of sin in the heart, and establishes holy love and filial dependence.

Teaching of the Bible.

It is impossible to look into the Bible, with the most ordinary attention, without feeling that we have got into a moral atmosphere quite different from that which we breathe in the world, and in which the world lives.

In the Bible, God is represented as doing everything, and as being the cause and the end of everything; and man appears only as he stands related to God,—either as a revolted creature or as the subject of Divine grace.

Whereas in the world, and in the books which contain the history of the world from its own point of view, man appears to do everything, and there is as little reference to God as if there were no such Being in the universe. "The fool hath said in his heart, No God—we desire none. Our lips are our own; we are they that ought to speak; who is Lord over us?" There seems to be a general agreement to shut God out of the world which He has made, and to suppress all reports of His claims and rights and sovereign power. The old serpent, who deceived our race, and poisoned it in its root, by that well-chosen temptation addressed to our first parents, "Ye shall be as gods," seems to have spoken the word into their very souls, so that it has become a part of their being—a part of their nature, which they have transmitted to their posterity. All would be gods. And men live in this lie, and strengthen each other in it, and they die in it.

Man a receiver.

Nothing seems more evident, even to reason, than that a creature can have nothing but what it receives from its Creator. But the pride of man's heart revolts at the idea of being a receiver. Alas! this

pride is his foolishness, for it has separated him from the ever full and ever flowing fountain of Divine love. He was formed to be a happy member of the family of God. All the members of that family are closely united to God; He is their Creator and their Fountain, their Head, their Heart. Their life-blood is His Holy Spirit flowing freely and fully through them. They are mere receivers, but they are receivers of God,—of the love and holiness and joy of God. He is their strength to will and to do. In His light they see light, and in His glory they are glorious. He is their full-satisfying eternal portion, abiding in them, and they in Him. He feeds them with the hidden manna, and gives them to drink of the water of life. His Spirit unites all the members of the family to each other, and there is no schism in that body; they have all their place in Him, they are all one in Him and with Him. They are dependent, but it is this very Spirit of dependence which keeps open all the sluices and avenues of their souls to admit the fulness of God. Each is a distinct individual, conscious of his own peculiar duties and peculiar blessedness, but the

principle which unites him to God is stronger than the principle of separate individuality; he is more a member of God's family than an individual; and as this principle uniting him to God is stronger than the principle of his own individuality, he sees and judges and feels things in the light of God, and as they relate to Him, rather than in his own light, or as they relate to himself individually. He is a sharer in the common light and common interests of the family; there is not a holy feeling in the universe to which his heart does not vibrate; he enters into the joy of his Lord, and that embraces all joys.

We look at this picture from a distance, and wonder at the madness of man, which banished him from so fair a scene; but we need go no further than our own hearts to see the cause of this sad banishment. The spirit of dependence is lost,—that open door by which God enters the heart. The spirit of independence shuts the heart against God, and cuts off its supply from the Fountain of Life. "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it," says our God; but we refuse to hearken. "My people would not hear my voice, Israel would none of me."

Oh what a mass of misery was before the mind of our God when He uttered these words! They are few and simple, but they describe a madness and iniquity and sorrow passing utterance! Yet they breathe compassion; and in this lies our hope, for it is the compassion of God. As the approving love of God is the light and air and joy of His unfallen family, so His tender mercies, His long-suffering, His holy compassion, manifested in Christ Jesus, are the only hope of return to those who are fallen. As His approving love could enter the hearts of His unfallen children by no other avenue but the open door of their dependence, even so must His holy compassion enter our hearts.

The nature of true humility.

Humility is but another name for the spirit of dependence. It is the realization of our true condition before God, and of our true relation to Him. The world does not know what humility means; the world's humility is mere diffidence or fear or affectation; but real humility is truth and confidence and assured hope: for the truly humble heart recognises itself as a receiver, and feels content to be so; it hears its Lord's voice saying, "Open thy mouth

wide and I will fill it;" it opens and receives the fulness of the blessing. "For thus saith the High and Lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a humble and contrite heart, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." Humility is the acceptance of the true spiritual order. It teaches the branch to abide in the vine. It restores the disordered hierarchy in the heart by replacing God upon His throne there. Humility is simply truth, and independence is nothing but a lie, honouring the branch above the vine, the member above the body, and the creature above the Creator,—calling a stream the fountain, and a planet the sun.

It is impossible that the creature can perform a single spiritual act aright whilst it continues in independence. A branch torn from the tree ceases to have its vegetable life, and is no longer capable of performing the functions of that life, because the sap of the root no longer circulates through it. And man separating himself from the spiritual system loses his spiritual life and his capacity of spiritual

action; for the life-blood of that system, even the Holy Spirit, no longer animates him.

And yet, as if impelled by the uneradicated instincts of his original nature, formed for the exercise and enjoyment of spiritual life, he often desires and attempts to perform the functions of that life, not considering that he has cut himself off from the source which alone supplies life and strength for the performance of these functions.

A hand separated from the strength of the body by dislocation or fracture is incapable of doing any service to the body; every effort to use a hand in these circumstances would be vain; the only reasonable hope lies in adopting means for curing the dislocation or fracture. Even so, man's only hope lies in his reunion with God, in his being grafted on the true vine through the spirit of dependence. Nothing done by independent human effort can have the nature of spiritual life; it is out of the spiritual order; therefore it is that the Scriptures sometimes seem to speak more of what God has done for grafting man again into the vine, than of what is required from man as duty. When God has enlarged man's heart—when man has been delivered from the narrow-

ness of his own selfish individuality and grafted on the root of God's infinite love and quickened by His free Spirit—then he will run in the way of God's commandments.

Man's false centre and his true centre.

So long as man remains the centre of his own system, it is merely a matter of interested consideration how much he should sacrifice to the will of God, in order to secure himself from the consequences of Divine displeasure. Such negotiation has nothing of true religion in it; there is nothing in common between such feelings and the generous uncalculating devotedness of a child of God. It is from taking this view of religion, that metaphysicians have often regarded it as a mere variety of the selfish system of morals; they suppose heaven and hell to be the great motives in Christianity, and these they regard only as reward and punishment addressed to the interested feelings of selfish hope and fear. But this is altogether a misapprehension. Selfish hope or fear may drive a man to seek after religion, but religion itself is another thing: it is the displacing of this selfish individuality from its supremacy in the heart, and restoring that supremacy to Him whose right it is.

The moral reformations which men make on themselves, uninfluenced by the Spirit of God, are but the results of a refined selfishness. They give up certain gratifications, because they perceive that their evil consequences in the future overbalance any present pleasure they can give; but the doctrine of self-denial, as such, is foolishness to them. They say, Show us that certain privations are good for our health or our reputation or our safety, and we shall feel it to be our wisdom to submit to them; but the idea of putting down self, as self, is unintelligible. Yet the fall of man *consists in self having taken the place of God in the heart;* and the object of the Christian duty of self-denial is not merely to pay homage to God, but to weaken this usurper in our hearts, and to unbar that door which shuts God out.

This leads to a true view of God's purpose in making the life of man so full of sorrow. Sorrow indeed cannot of itself break the selfishness of the heart. Ungodly sorrow is as selfish as ungodly joy. Its language sounds more like religion than that of joy, but in reality they are not much unlike. Joy rests in the present while the stream runs smooth. Sorrow looks at the future, because the pre-

sent is painful; it looks to heaven, because earth is darkened; and it wishes that God, or any other Being who can, would deliver it from its pain. But this is still self; it is Pharaoh trembling under the rod of Moses; it is man growing out of his own root, and seeing things in his own light. And so we often find that when the pain is removed, the repentance disappears along with it. "When He smote them, they sought Him; but within a while, they forgat his works, and would none of His counsel." When Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart.

Sorrow alone cannot take man off his own root, and graft him on the true vine. This is work for Him who made us. Yet there is a great use in sorrow. It gives pause to the soul, it shows us that we are not able of ourselves to help ourselves, and that the creature cannot satisfy us. It acquaints us with the fact that God's way is different from our way, and presses us to inquire into the cause of this difference; and above all, it suggests the thought of prayer, because it awakens a sense of need, and thus, by the Divine blessing, it often becomes the instrument of drawing wandering sinners back to God.

Relation between the Creator and the creature.

I have sometimes been led to think that in our modern systems of religion the relation between the Creator and the creature is too much lost sight of, and merged in the particular doctrines of Christianity. No doubt, it may be answered that this relation is supposed and taken for granted in all religions. But this is not enough. The creative and sovereign and personal omnipotence of God is, to our minds, the basis of Deity; and the sentiment of creaturely dependence on Him, which arises out of our recognition of it, and corresponds to it, is the basis of religion. The doctrines of Christianity are necessary as the declarations of the character of the omnipotent Creator; but without the sense of His living reality, there can be no *religion*, and Christianity becomes a mere set of notions.

There can be no doubt that a great deal of the Christianity of our day is of this spurious kind, or at least has a mixture of it. And there are times in which God, by His dealings with us, sends a fearful conviction of its unreality into the heart. He brings a genuine reality, such as death, and sets it before us, and makes us feel how mere notions melt into nothing at its presence,

and how utterly vain and valueless any doctrines are which do not unite us to God, by a bond as real as death is real. The living personality of God must, if I may use the expression, animate and fill out our systems of Christian doctrine—otherwise they only tend to add a fatal security to the sleep of the soul. They may be subjects of talk to us, as the gods of gold and silver furnished talk to Belshazzar and his lords, until some providence surprise us, as the handwriting on the wall surprised them, and make us feel and know what it is to be in the presence of the real God, whom we have not glorified.

I feel persuaded, that no idea of a power *external* to us, however mighty, can ever produce the sentiment of creaturely dependence in the heart; there must be the sense of God *within* us, as the root and basis of our being,—as the continual supplier of strength for thought and action,—as "the fountain from which our current runs, or else dries up."

The Bible is full of this idea and feeling of God, subjective as well as objective. He is there not only the light which the eye sees, but He is the power of the eye to see the light. That practical atheism may enter

into the profession of religion, and may even become a zealous partisan of orthodox Christianity, is a fact which ought to produce much watchfulness and self-distrust. But the God who is revealed and contained in the doctrines, He it is alone who alarms and assails the independence of the natural man. When they are separated from Him and His omnipotence,—when they become mere syllogisms or emblazonments, they can take their place under the dark shadow of the atheism of the heart as well as the syllogisms or emblazonments of any other science.

But how different are these *forms* from the overawing reality with which the doctrines are animated in the Bible! And oh! how different is the effect produced by them on the hearts of their partisans, from those cries and breathings of the creature after the Creator, which are embalmed in the sacred record, and which still seem to ascend to heaven like incense from an altar! "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" "Thy hands have made me, and fashioned

me; give me understanding, that I may keep thy commandments." "I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever, I will trust in the covert of thy wings." "I am thine, O save me." Happy spirit, thou hast found thy fountain! thy cry enters with acceptance into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. "When thou saidst unto me, Seek ye my face, my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." Surely this sweet communion between heaven and earth is true religion. Oh for the putting forth of that power which made the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak, that such sounds might enter our hearts, and draw forth such answers. To a spirit thus bound by a real bond to the living God, life and death are equal, for it finds the will of God in either, and His will is its delight. It finds God in everything, and God is its portion. When Jesus says, "Behold, I come quickly," it answers, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." This is to walk with God.

There is something inexpressibly mysterious and solemn in the relation of the creature to the Creator. There is no parallel to it in the universe. When I think of it, I am overwhelmed by it. I am unable to conceive how I have the consciousness of a

separate existence distinct from my Creator. It seems to me that I am in regard to Him as a ray of light to the sun, proceeding continually out of His substance, and having no individuality of my own.

We are apt to lower our idea of this relation, by comparing it to the relation between men and their works. The potter forms the clay into a vessel, and that vessel is then completely independent of him—it does not require his thought or power to uphold its existence. And thus we are prone to think of God and His works as if they could exist independently of Him. But there is a vast difference. The potter merely takes advantage of the laws of nature, which are in continual action independently of him, and as it was by the application of their power that he fashioned it, so they uphold his work after it is finished. Thus, in fact, the potter creates nothing, he only changes the position of the clay. But the laws of nature are the continual actings of God. There is no power in the universe but His, and where His power is, there is He. He made the clay, and sustains it with all its qualities, whatever form may be given to it; and the cessation of His *will* that it should exist,

would be the cessation of its *existence.* The course of nature—the elements—the order of events—the existence and movement of all matter—are the direct actings of God. And are not the existence and movement of mind, too, His actings? Surely it must be so; my *will* is the sustained creature of His *will* from moment to moment, incapable of a single act without power communicated from Him,—and yet I am conscious that it works contrary to Him, and that it is morally responsible for so doing. This is too wonderful for me, I cannot attain unto it. O Lord, thus hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me.

With what feelings ought I to regard Him, to whose infinite mind my individual existence, with every particular of my history through the future eternity, has been from all past eternity a distinct and familiar idea? It was a birth of His mind from all eternity. At length He realized it, by calling me into life and giving me a substantial existence,—and He has ever since sustained this life, by His continually pervading presence in every part of my soul and body.

I have never been a single moment separated from Him. It is impossible that I

should be separated from Him without ceasing to exist. I have never been alone —and I know that through eternity I shall never be alone. I am sure that I have never formed a thought, nor uttered a word, nor done a deed, of which He has not been most intimately cognisant, and in which He has not been Himself the acting power, enabling me to think, and speak, and do.

And here is the great marvel. I am conscious that these thoughts, and words, and deeds, have been full of sin, and yet my conscience acquits Him, and lays the undivided blame upon myself. Who can solve this difficulty?

What an unspeakable relation is this! And what an infinite possibility of enjoyment arises out of this perpetually pervading presence, seeing it is a presence of infinite holiness and love and beauty and wisdom! It seems as if He were too near me to see Him, as the eye sees not itself; yet I feel assured that until I see Him and feel Him in His perpetually pervading presence of infinite holiness, and love and beauty and wisdom, I cannot have that good for which I was created. His presence is my real home and my real portion, and until I be-

come sensible of it, I am without a home and without a portion in the universe.

It is appalling to know that there is a Being so near me, surrounding me, and inhabiting me, and yet that He should remain unseen and unknown by me; and is it not still more appalling to know that in this Being and His relation with me is treasured up a possibility of good beyond utterance and beyond conception, and yet that I may have no part in it? Alas! that I should have a sense which informs me of the presence of material light, and makes it a pleasant thing for me to behold the sun, and that I should have no sense to inform me of the presence of the Light of Life, and to give me joy in conversing with His brightness.

The spirit of dependence is the spirit of religion, and the spirit of independence is the spirit of atheism and of idolatry.[1] This

[1] At first sight it appears remarkable, that the Bible should at the same moment charge men with the guilt of idolatry, and of atheism. It would seem impossible that the same individual should be guilty of both. Atheism consists in having no God, and idolatry seems to consist in having too many. But, in fact, there is no God in idolatry any more than in atheism. The notion of various independent powers, which is the spirit of

atheism of the heart then—this insensibility to God—this blindness to His direct actings—this spirit of independence, under the influence of which we live surrounded by God, and sustained by Him, and yet entirely unconnected with Him in spirit and desire, this being the evil to be remedied by Christianity, does it not seem most reasonable to expect that there should be in the remedy an especial putting forth of the direct agency

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idolatry, is the spirit of atheism. God is the one power which does all things, and the one Fountain from which all things flow. The course of nature and providence—the course of life and being, are the actings of that power, and the streams from that fountain. The spirit of religion goes directly to this first cause, seeing, acknowledging, and feeling it in all things; it regards second causes, whether they be the elements of nature or the actions of men, as mere channels through which this first and only cause operates; it stops not at them; it regards life as a holy thing flowing out of this Fountain, and returning thither,—it lives, and moves, and has its being in God, by the spirit of its will as well as by the necessity of its nature. The spirit of atheism and idolatry alike stops short at second causes; seeing independent powers in everything, and itself claiming independence. It acknowledges that there are powers stronger than itself, as one man is stronger than another. But it regards existence as its own possession, though liable to be invaded and affected by superior powers, and on this possession it can stand and parley, and make conditions with these powers, whatever they may be.

of God, and that He should reveal Himself through it in such a way that the soul may know and feel that it is God of a truth that worketh, and none other than He?

The branch separated from the vine cannot graft itself on again; if it could, the order of nature would be subverted. And man separated from God cannot, according to the order of a higher nature, again unite himself to God. Indeed, this appears to me so full of the highest reason and evidence, that I should consider the great purpose of Christianity absolutely defeated, were it possible for man to become a Christian by his own unassisted efforts, or without a conviction of the necessity of divine assistance. Nay, it would be an absurdity—it would be teaching the spirit of dependence by an argument for independence—it would be leading man to repose his all on God by showing him that he could do without God.

The true state of the creature is a state of absolute dependence on the Creator, and when he has left his true state, he can only be brought back to it by Him from whom he has wandered, and by a way of absolute dependence. All the messages of God to man have related to this way of return, and

have been filled with the most urgent calls to come back by it, and the most solemn warnings against refusing the voice of Him who speaketh from heaven. All these messages have been messages of love. And man needs such a message, for his conscience testifies against him, and tells him of his sin, and of God's just displeasure at sin, and thus forbids the spirit of confidence, while at the same time it commands the spirit of dependence.

Therefore the gospel is indeed a welcome message; for it tells of the love of God to sinners,—of His having provided an atonement for sin, and of His open arms ready to embrace all who come to Him through this atonement. The knowledge of the grace of God through Jesus Christ converts the dependence of necessity into a dependence of love, and thus grafts man into the true vine.

CHAPTER II.

Forgiveness the means not the end contemplated in the Gospel.

Confiding dependence the true state of the creature.

"THOU shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and mind, and soul and strength, and thy neighbour as thyself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets; and the whole object of the gospel is the fulfilling of them in our hearts. They describe the perfection of man's spiritual state. They describe his confiding devoted dependence on the great Root of the spiritual family, and his fraternal sympathy with all the branches. When the love of the Creator is the dominant principle in the creature's heart, it keeps all the other principles and faculties and relations of the soul in their proper place. It is the true key-stone of the arch, which gives strength by maintaining order. It is the principle which connects the creature with

the spiritual system, enabling it to receive of the fulness of the Creator.

The fall of this key-stone from its place in man's heart *was*, and *is*, the fall of man from his place in the family of God. Self and the creature took the place of God, and each man became an independent individual,—loving and desiring and approving things according as they affected himself, without regard to the will of God or the sympathies of the universal family. This is the fall and the sin and the misery of man,—that the first and paramount relation has not the first and paramount place in his heart, and that self—the principle of individuality—has usurped that place, and has thus cut off the blessed communication between God and man, which had been, and could only be, maintained through the channel of a supreme affection.

And as this is the fall of man, so his restoration can be nothing else than the restoration of the love of God as the paramount principle in the heart, resulting in the due subordination of self and the creature under it. Any remedy which falls below this restoration falls below man's need. No pardon which leaves this undone is of any value to him. He needs no infliction from without to make

him miserable,—and it is not the removal of any outward infliction that can give him happiness. He must love God supremely. He must know that God is better than happiness, and that sin is worse than sorrow. The love of God, not the desire of happiness, is the true key-stone of the arch. "He that will save his life shall lose it, and he that will lose his life for my sake shall find it."

But if he loses his life *not for Christ's sake*, but with the hope of saving it, he is out of the order of the blessing. For the very object of the gospel is to displace self and the creature from the heart, and to restore the love of God to the supremacy which is its due, thus restoring man to his place in the family of God. It effects this object by setting before us in Christ Jesus a true representation of the gracious character of God in relation to His rebellious creatures. Christ is the revelation of God in relation to sinners. The gospel tells us how full of love he is towards sinners, in all his feelings and in all his actions. It tells us of a love beyond utterance and conception,—of his humbling himself even to the death of the cross for them, of his suffering for them on earth, of his reigning for them in heaven; and then

it says that he who hath seen Jesus hath seen the Father. The gospel tells us that this is *our God*, the God who made us and *with whom we have to do*,—that this is He from whom we have been turning away with fear or indifference, and who yet has all along been thus loving us, and putting forth His love to us continually in every breath which we draw, and in all the care and protection and support which we experience; and it tells us this that we may feel it no constraint to love Him supremely, to choose Him for our portion, to depend on Him with an absolute confidence, and thus to have our individual will subordinated to His will.

First promise of a Deliverer.

Before Christ came into the world, God had promised that he should come; for no sooner had man fallen than he received an intimation of God's purpose of restoring him. There is something very striking in the form in which this first intimation of a Deliverer was given; and it appears to me that much instruction as to the nature of the gospel may be obtained by examining its characteristic features. The intimation, as appears from the record in the third chapter of Genesis, was not directly addressed to our first parents themselves, but formed a part of the

sentence pronounced in their hearing, against the serpent who had deceived them. "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

The most prominent feature in this sentence is, that the serpent's head was to be bruised by a descendant of the woman. This intimated to the human pair the purpose of God to raise up a champion of their race, who should avenge their quarrel with the serpent, and undo what he had done. Now, as the work of the serpent had been to draw them away from the love of God, so the undoing of that work was to draw them back to the love of God; as the serpent's work had been to introduce sin and its consequences into the world, so the undoing of that work was to destroy sin and its consequences.

This sentence of final destruction was pronounced on the serpent before Adam and Eve received their own sentence. As they stood trembling before their Judge, they heard the sentence pronounced against their deceiver, in which his final defeat and the subversion of his plans by one of their own

descendants were predicted. They thus learned that God had not abandoned them, and that His thoughts towards them were thoughts of compassion, even whilst pronouncing sentence upon them. They learned that, although they were to be sent forth from Paradise into the wilderness of the world,—although they were to be taught the evil of sin by a life of suffering, yet God was even then preparing the means of their return. Would not this discovery wholly change the character of their feelings towards Him? They had feared His wrath, they knew they had deserved it, and their consciences spoke terror. But they found that He pitied them, and that although they were to suffer, yet it was love which was appointing and measuring out the suffering. Would they not feel that the sting of the suffering was taken away, and would not the thought of God's compassionate care sweeten that cup of sorrow, which their own hands had mixed? Would they not read in the compassion which gave this consolation, an assurance of forgiveness? They had been hiding themselves amongst the trees of the garden from the face of their Creator, but now His presence would be to them a refuge

and a protection, a sun and a shield. They had felt themselves to be banished from His family, and to be no longer His children; but this revelation of His final purpose proved that He was still their Father, even while chastening them, and that they might be still His children even under chastisement.

Thus the promise of the Saviour did for our first parents, in the extent in which it was really apprehended by them, that which the Saviour himself, when he came in the flesh, did for all who received him. "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." Faith in the promise gave them the feelings and the privileges of children, and changed their dependence of necessity into a dependence of delighted choice. It taught them to accept their punishment in submission and hope; for they now knew that it was their Father's good pleasure and purpose that sin and sorrow and death should one day be abolished, and could therefore pray with confidence for the coming of that day, knowing their Father's love, and knowing that their petition was according to His will.

I do not think that I have attributed to this first intimation of the Saviour, any effect on the minds and feelings of Adam and Eve, beyond what is conceivable and probable in their circumstances. And now I shall endeavour to explain the use which I wish to make of this case. I have supposed that Adam and Eve would infer from the promise of the seed, that God pitied them, and had a gracious purpose of restoring them. I have also supposed that this judgment which they formed of the compassionate feelings of God towards them would necessarily inspire them with confidence towards Him, and would lead them to regard Him as a Father who had forgiven them in His heart. Yet there was not a single word spoken by God on that occasion directly pronouncing a present or promising a future pardon; therefore their confidence could only arise from a conviction that the promise of a Deliverer was the proof of love which necessarily included forgiveness. The belief of the existence of a compassionate feeling towards them in the mind of God could not but inspire them with some degree of confidence; and when they knew that this compassion was actually occupied with a plan for

God's love implies forgiveness.

undoing the evil which their fall had introduced, that confidence would rise nearer to assurance.

From this proof of the existence of love they would infer pardon as a necessary consequence. If they had not heard this intimation of a deliverance, or if they had heard without understanding, they would have had none of those feelings of confidence; and instead of exercising the privileges of sons, and leaning on God's omnipotent love, they would have still shunned His presence, and feared Him as their enemy. And yet the mind of God, and His purposes towards them, would have been the same. Their want of faith would prevent any change of mind in themselves, and therefore would prevent their justification, that is, their being set right with God; and consequently it would prevent their sanctification, for without confidence in God's good-will towards them, they could not love Him nor do any of the works which proceed from love. Their forgiveness, *in the heart of God*, would have been as much a matter of fact as they now saw it to be. The difference between their receiving the testimony, and their not receiving it, was a difference affecting their

own minds; it did not change the truth of the matter testified. God had not spoken to them of the necessity of faith in His testimony. He had not held out any promise to faith, but if the testimony was believed, it would *necessarily* do its own work, and if not believed, that work would as necessarily remain undone. Faith, according to its degree, must have done for Adam and Eve all that it ever did or can do for any one, enabling them to see, though perhaps dimly, that it was His purpose to destroy sin, and thus to save the sinner; and they would have peace through this conviction; that is to say, they would be justified by faith.

Now, I would ask the reader if he thinks it possible that God gave them any premium on account of their believing the intimation—that He pardoned them *because* they believed it? Surely not; or that He pardoned them *in believing it*, as it is sometimes expressed; that is to say, that He bestowed on them belief and pardon at the same time? Surely the expression, "They were justified by faith," when applied to them, would seem to signify simply this,—that believing the reality of the love of God as expressed in the gracious purpose which He had

intimated to them respecting the future Deliverer, they took their forgiveness as included in it, and looked with confidence towards God. This, I believe, was their justification,—if they were indeed justified,—and this I believe to have been the justification of every child of man who ever has been justified, from that hour to this; for I am persuaded that no one ever receives or ever did receive anything in consequence of his belief of a truth, other than the natural effect of that truth upon his mind.

Pardon does not imply remission of punishment.

Doubtless it will appear to many a strange sort of pardon which did not remit the punishment; for Paradise remained barred, and the sentence of sorrow and of death remained unreversed. But God had spoken in their hearing of His gracious purposes respecting them, and that was forgiveness,—all the forgiveness which they needed,—and though His hand might still for a season be heavy on them, it was the hand of a Father, and for their good.

And when we recollect the object of the gospel and the evil it was intended to remedy, we shall feel that this was precisely what was required. The hearts of the offenders

were to be drawn back to the love of God for what He is, and not for His gifts. It was part of His purpose to teach them to seek satisfaction in Himself by stripping them of His gifts, and by making them feel their own insufficiency, thus leading them back to a child-like dependence on Himself.

It was their own spirit of independence which had cut them off from God's family, which had extinguished in them the principle of spiritual life, and had cast them down from heaven, by shutting God out from their hearts. A pardon which did not restore the spirit of dependence would still have left them miserable outcasts. They had fallen by following their own selfish individual will, rather than the good and holy will of the great Father of the spiritual family. And now God in love made them feel the bitterness of their own will, and of their own root. He allowed them to be surrounded with darkness and hopelessness, and then He presented to them His own holy will as the only light in the midst of the darkness, the only refuge in the midst of the hopelessness, and thus He invited their dependence, and urged them to return; and He taught them, even by the terms of the

promise, to regard His holy abhorrence of sin as the only foundation of their hope.

For the promise was, that the serpent's head should be bruised; that is to say, that sin, self-will, and independence, as well as their consequences, should be rooted out. So long as these evil principles continued to be the chosen counsellors of their hearts, such a promise could give them no comfort. But when they learned to look on sin—the essence of which is selfishness—as the enemy which had ruined them, then they would regard with thankfulness God's avowed determination to exterminate it; His holiness and His abhorrence of evil would be to them the pledges of their own future deliverance.

It is not the least important or striking feature in this first intimation of the gospel, that it is thus expressed rather in the form of a denunciation against sin than of direct pardon to the sinner. It marks that the only real mercy to the sinner must manifest itself in the destruction of sin,—that the love of God is essentially a consuming fire to sin,—and that, in the dealings of God with regard to man, the restoration of happiness is less thought of than the restoration of holiness.

No pardon can be worthy of God, or could possibly proceed from Him, which does not agree with and strengthen the sanctions of holiness. But this is not all. There can be no peace for a moral being which does not rest on the foundations of moral truth. If Adam had felt his own moral sense compromised by his pardon, that pardon could never have given him peace; it could not even have given him the feeling of personal security;—there would have remained a restless misgiving in his soul that all was not well, seeing that the God of holiness cannot cease to abhor sin. There can be no way of giving true peace to the sinner, except by making God's abhorrence of sin the very ground of the sinner's hope. The agony of Adam's mind could not have arisen merely from the fear of consequences; a sense of sin must have been its chief element. And now from the sentence on the serpent he understood that evil was to be destroyed, and right was to triumph. He saw that whatever might be the nature of God's purposes, the palliation of the guilt of sin did not enter into them, as the head of the rebellion was to be crushed. He thus felt assured that God made no com-

promise of truth when He spoke hope to the sinner.

The serpent's promised pardon was a mere impunity in sin,—"Ye shall not surely die." Its object was to encourage sin. God's pardon embraced the destruction of sin, and its object was to restore to holiness. We have need to beware of mistaking the serpent's hiss for the grace of God. The hope of impunity given by the serpent encouraged Adam to yield to the promptings of his earthly desires. The holy forgiveness of God encouraged and allured him to return back to God, not so much as a refuge from punishment, as from sin and from weakness, from earthly desires and from the assaults of that spiritual enemy who had stolen his jewel from him.

We may hope that our first parents were saved by their faith.

And although the Word of God is sparing of information with regard to the effect of the promise upon him, yet it is not inconsistent with the tenor of that information to hope and believe, that he who was the first offender, was also the first monument of saving grace;—that with the promise he received the spirit of the promise, and the consolation of the promise, into his soul. For surely never was there a created Be-

ing that stood in such need of a strong consolation. He had breathed the air of Eden, and had been cast out of it,—who has ever made such a shipwreck? He felt himself to be the author of a foul stain on the universe of God. He felt that his act was irretrievable, that he had opened a flood-gate which he could not again shut, and through which a dark tide rolled in, overwhelming all the destinies which had been committed to his keeping. He saw this tide rolling in,—he felt that it was his work, and that he could not stop it. Verily he had need of a strong consolation. Who ever but him had his conscience burdened with the ruin of a world! He knew somewhat of the value of the light of God's countenance,—and he knew somewhat of the horror of its loss; he had tasted the good and the evil,—and he knew that *his* heart and *his* hand had done the deed which had severed all his descendants from the tree of life, and made them outcasts from God and wanderers through a homeless wilderness. And whereas he had been intrusted by God, for their behoof, with the pearl of eternal life, he had cast it from him, and instead of it had bequeathed to them the bitter cup of

sorrow and death, and a proneness to every crime, and an exposure to every misery. What a blow must Cain's murder have given to his heart, and what a fearful sense must it have given him of the living and growing and spreading reality of that curse which he himself had brought upon his offspring; and as his prophetic spirit went down that troubled stream of human life which was to issue from him, would not each drop lift up in the ear of his conscience an accusing voice against him, and as the various forms of outrage and calamity succeeded each other, would not his heart wither with the thought, "This is my work"?

But the gospel was sent to comfort all that mourn,—and surely it comforted this father of mourners. For the serpent's doom revealed to him the love of God. "This was the rest wherein his wearied spirit found rest, and this was the refreshing." This love was the love of Him who was, and is, and shall be,—the Infinite in power and in wisdom; of Him who can make darkness light, and crooked things straight: and He had pledged His faithful word that He would undo this evil which had entered into the world. Surely we may hope that Adam

looked forward to the day of the Deliverer, and rejoiced to think that on that day God was to be glorified and Man restored.

When once he had learned this, he was in possession of the secret of the Lord,—the secret of peace,—for he would see the God of love in everything. He would see in every event a preparation for the coming of the Deliverer. In every affliction he would recognise the plan of restoration. He would feel how well his present sorrow suited with his spiritual needs. He had fallen by seeking good, not in God, but in the creature. God's gifts had hid God from his soul, instead of being used as channels of communion with Him. He was now stript of these gifts; but it was that he might learn that the Giver was better than the gift; and that even in the absence of all gifts, God was Himself an overflowing fulness, satiating every weary soul, and replenishing every sorrowful soul. For God's best gifts are no portion for man; He is Himself the portion of the soul, and so long as He is sought only for His gifts, He is Himself unknown and unprized.

And now I would say that every one who in like manner understands the manifestation

of love which was contained in that first promise, and which reached its full development in Christ, must have the same sense of his own personal place in the heart of God. For only consider—the gospel reveals to us the existence of a fund of divine love, containing in it *a propitiation for all sin, and a promise to destroy all the works of the devil*,—the sin—the misery—the death, which he has introduced;—and this fund is *general* to the whole race, every individual has a property in it, of the same kind that he has in the common air and light of this world, which he appropriates and uses simply by opening his mouth or his eyes. Is it not clear, that as soon as any one really knows that such a fund exists, and that it is, indeed, the gift of God to the world, and the common property of all the individuals in the world, just as the natural air or light is, he will immediately infer his own particular interest in it, and enter into the enjoyment of it, and he will make that blessed discovery which no tongue can rightly describe, and no mere intelligence can rightly conceive, even that he himself has a possession, an unalienable, an everlasting possession in the heart of God?

This conception of the gospel strikes at the root of man's selfish individuality.

There is another feature in this first intimation of the gospel which merits consideration,—and that is its generality. It strikes at the root of the selfishness and narrow individuality of will which has taken possession of that place in man's heart which ought to be filled by the wide will of God, and by sympathy with the whole spiritual family. Its consolation is not a selfish consolation. It calls on men to share in higher and more extended interests than their own; and in accordance with this, each is led to infer his own pardon, and his own individual place in God's heart, not from any special declaration to himself, but from a manifestation of the holy love of God to the whole world.

When I consider this important feature of the first promise, I cannot help thinking that the expectation of the restitution of all things occupies a much less space in the usual preaching of the gospel, and in the thoughts of men, than it ought to do. It is the chief feature of that gospel which was preached to Adam, and it is bequeathed to the Church in the last words of inspiration as an enduring consolation and expectation,—"Behold I come quickly." The

statements of the gospel in our days relate too exclusively to what is past, and to the individual salvation of each believer. Of course it is impossible altogether to separate the doctrine of Christ's sacrifice from its general and future results; but these results seem to me not brought forward with such emphasis as they are in the Bible. I do not speak of the detail of these results, nor of the particular fulfilment of prophecies supposed to refer to the last times; but I speak of a fixed and longing expectation of the accomplishment of those promises which announce the final triumph of the Messiah, the establishment of his reign upon earth, the manifestation of the sons of God, and the full development of all those high privileges which arise out of their union with their Divine Head.

If selfishness be really one of the chief elements in the fall of man, it might be expected that the divinely bestowed medicine for sick souls should contain an ingredient specially fitted to counteract and remove that selfishness. And such an ingredient we find in the *universality* both of the declaration and purpose of the gospel; a feature which must necessarily impress its

own character on the hope of every one who rests upon it. For if this conception of the Gospel is true, the first hope which any man can arrive at with regard to his own personal acceptance with God must be drawn from the great general manifestation of Divine love, directed to the destruction of evil and to the restoration of the ruined race. The individual drops are thus merged in the ocean, and self is lost in the "liberty, the universality, the impartiality of heaven."

What Adam was thus taught to expect, we yet look forward to. The Champion has appeared, but evil is still spread over the earth, and the serpent's crested and uncrushed head still towers above it. Yet the work is going on which will accomplish the great prediction on which the destiny of our race hangs. We know that the government of the world is in the hand of God, and therefore we may rest assured that there is not a single link in the apparently perplexed chain of human events which does not connect with and guide to the coming glory. And we may rest assured, not only that all the histories of the kingdoms of this world are under the influence of an unfelt but irresistible control, preparing the way

for that kingdom which cannot be moved, but also that personal events as well as national, private as well as public, are all under the same mandate,—commissioned to lead on to the same great consummation. This truth gives a seriousness and a dignity to everything. It banishes littleness from life, because it connects all life with the glory of God and the eradication of evil; it leads us on, as under the shadow of everlasting and omnipotent Love, in the faith of which we may rest in peace until all calamities be overpast.

When the eye of the spirit is thus opened to see God working—in everything and by everything—to bring on the reign of righteousness, we shall feel ourselves invited to the blessed privilege of entering into the purposes of God, of sympathizing with the everlasting counsels of His grace, of rejoicing in their assured fulfilment, and of being fellow-workers with Him in every action of life. These actions may appear small and insignificant in the world's judgment, but the believer knows that it is not in vain that the Ruler of the universe has called him to do all things to the glory of God.

These are animating thoughts for poor wan-

derers in the wilderness, who are listening to the Saviour's voice. For them the fall, with all its sin and misery and darkness, will soon pass away, having served (under the control of Him who bringeth good out of evil) to glorify the Divine attributes, and to introduce a high and holy and happy order of things—higher and holier and happier than that which Adam lost, because founded on a nearer relation with God and a fuller manifestation of His character.

Confidence in God's love antecedent to all true obedience.

Men are disposed to imagine that if pardon be made conditional it will be more effectual as a stimulus to exertion. But the answer to this objection is, that Christian obedience does not consist in doing certain actions and abstaining from others, without regard to the motive from which this conduct proceeds—Christian obedience consists in holy love to God in habitual exercise. Now it is quite evident that no hope of reward could produce this kind of obedience. The heart cannot be induced to love by anything except by the real or apparent loveableness of the object. A man might do or suffer much in order to obtain pardon of sin; but this is not what God requires; He

requires the heart. He requires a generous disinterested love, which longs to express itself in every possible act of devotedness, counting all little and vile in comparison of the worthiness of Him whom it desires to please. The obedience which God asks is the free obedience of a child, not a mercenary negotiation for deliverance from punishment. True obedience can only be rendered by a spirit which rejoices that God desires its love; both because it recognises in this demand a Father's heart, and because it feels that amidst all its failures and all its weaknesses it yet has love to give. It is impossible that such loving obedience as this can exist in a heart which feels the weight of unpardoned sin, and regards God as an offended Governor and condemning Judge; for an assurance of forgiveness must precede confidence, and what love can there be without confidence? Is it not reasonable, then, to think that He who demands the love of the heart should begin by removing that fear of condemnation which would prevent love?

But the gospel is much more than a mere putting away of past transgression. Nothing short of *a manifestation of God* can be

a true gospel to sinners. If our hearts were attracted to anything else than God Himself, —if remission of penalty were the chief attraction,—we should still be out of our place in the spiritual system. God is the centre of that system; there can be no other. The pardon of the gospel is just the manifestation of the Divine character in relation to sinners. In relation to His sinless and happy creatures His character is holy complacency; but, in relation to those who are sinful and weak and miserable, it is holy compassion. Forgiveness, therefore, is the prominent feature in the gospel; it is "God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, *not imputing their trespasses to them.*" Forgiveness is a permanent condition of the heart of God.

When through Christ Jesus we learn to apprehend this, all self-pleasing thoughts of personal merit are extinguished. What have we done to Him or for Him who hath done this for us? We have repaid Him by preferring the least of His gifts to Himself,—by turning a deaf ear to His condescending invitations of fatherly kindness, and by offering Him the reluctant service of our hands and the ceremonial of our tongues,

as an adequate return for His heart's love. If we know this love, we shall feel annihilated by it; we have nothing to give in return which is not despicable, when considered as payment. But God asks no payment. He asks but the filial trust of the creature who is the work of His own hands, as that in which He delights, and as that in which the good and the happiness of the creature consist. He has dearly earned our gratitude and our confidence, and these feelings, when wrought into the heart, put us in our proper place towards Him. Affectionate dependence on the Creator is the spiritual health of the creature, as averseness and independence are his spiritual disease.

Spiritual gravitation.

Men are very apt to consider sin as consisting merely in this or that particular action. The old philosophers taught that virtue is the mean between two extremes; thus, for example, that the virtue of generosity is the mean between the vices of prodigality and avarice; courage the mean between rashness and timidity, and so of the rest: thus making the difference between virtue and vice to lie merely in the degree, not in

the kind. But the Word of God teaches another sort of morals. According to it, sin consists in the absence of the love of God from the heart, as the dominant principle; so that sin is not so much an act as a manner of being. It is not necessary to go to the expense of an action in order to sin; the habitual state of most minds,—of all minds, indeed, naturally, even in their most quiescent form,—is sin; that is to say, the love of God is not dominant in them.

The centripetal force constitutes an element in every line which the planet moves in its orbit. Were the influence of this force to be suspended, we should not think of reckoning the number of aberrations which the planet might make in its ungoverned career; we should say that its whole manner of being, severed from the solar influence, was one continued and radical aberration. In like manner, the soul ought to feel the love of God as a governing element along the whole course of its existence; every movement of thought and feeling and desire ought to contain it, as an essential part of its nature. When this principle is wanting, we need not reckon the moral

aberrations which the spirit makes; its whole existence is an aberration, it is cut off from the spiritual system of the universe, it has lost its gravitation.

In such a state of things, it is evident that a pardon which did not bring back the wanderer, and restore his lost gravitation, would be of no use to him; until his gravitation is recovered, he is a blot on the creation. Love to God is the gravitation of the soul, and it is restored by the apprehension of His mind and will as revealed in Christ Jesus. A faith which does not restore spiritual gravitation is useless; and that only is true gravitation which keeps the soul in its orbit.

The movement of the soul along the path of duty, under the influence of holy love to God, constitutes what in Scripture are called good works. Good works are works which proceed from true principles. The external form of an action cannot alone determine whether it be a good work or not. Its usefulness to others may be determined by its external form, but its moral worth depends on the moral spring from which it flows. Good works, then, are properly healthy works,—works proceeding from a

living principle. Healthy bodily actions can only proceed from healthy bodily principles; and healthy spiritual actions can proceed only from healthy spiritual principles. All efforts to do good, apart from that life from above which our Lord proclaimed to Nicodemus, are in Scripture called dead works.

A man who has lost his health does not recover it again by any endeavour to perform healthy bodily actions, for of these his bad health renders him incapable (in which incapacity, indeed, his bad health consists), but by the use of some remedial system, generally involving much self-denial; and as health returns, its proper and natural actions return along with it. Health is not produced by these actions, but it produces them, and is strengthened by them. Physical enjoyment consists in these healthful actions; they are the spontaneous language of physical health. They constitute the music, as it were, which results from the organ being well tuned.

It is the same thing with the actions of the soul. Spiritual health is not acquired by good actions, but it is followed by them, and strengthened by them. They also are

music, sweet music. And oh! were these spirits of ours, with their thousand strings, but rightly tuned, what a swell of high and lovely song would issue from them,—a song of holy joy and praise, commencing even here, and still rising upwards, until it blended with the full harmony of that choir which surrounds the throne of God.

CHAPTER III.

The true meaning of Justification by Faith.

WERE some great convulsion of nature to destroy all the human race save one single individual, the Bible with all its contents would belong to that individual. It is addressed to Adam's race, and he would be the sole representative of the race; but we all and each of us belong to and represent Adam's race as much as such an individual would; we have therefore the same right in the contents of the Bible that he could have.

Appropriation involved in the very idea of faith.

I am persuaded that faith in the gospel always is and always must be an *appropriating faith*, and that there is no true faith in the gospel which is not so. When a man opens his eyes upon the sun, he necessarily appropriates his share of its light, and he cannot look upon the sun without making this appropriation. In like man-

ner no man can look upon the Sun of righteousness, which is the love of God manifested in Christ Jesus, without appropriating his own share of its blessed light. He that believes really in the love of God to the world cannot but believe in the love of God to himself. The general belief and the appropriating belief are not two beliefs, but one—just as the general receiving the light of the sun, and the particular receiving our own share, are not two receivings, but one. God tells me in His Word that "He is in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing unto them their trespasses." When this message comes to me, can I put any other interpretation on it than that God is reconciling me, and not imputing my trespasses to me? I think that any person who understands the meaning of these words, and believes them to be the true words of God, must see that they imply forgiveness for himself.

The following passage from a very interesting account of the conversion of a young man who died at St. Helena, is a striking illustration of the doctrine which I have been endeavouring to explain. "His faith seemed to have no mixture of imper-

fection in it, for he simply and sincerely took for granted that all God said in His Word was true, and was astonished to hear any of us express our want of assurance of faith, or of a constant and abiding sense of our personal interest in Christ. This to him was a mystery we could never explain, and which, happily for himself, he died in entire ignorance of." Surely of such is the kingdom of heaven. Happy man!—he had opened his mouth and God had filled it. We need go no further than this to understand the nature of the assurance of faith. A present sense of the love of God revealed in Christ will always give assurance, or in other words, justification; and when that sense decays, the assurance must decay,—no *remembrance* of it can fill its place.

Justification not a judicial act of God.

It appears to me quite clear that justification is described by St. Paul as a state of mind proceeding from or arising out of faith; whereas, *if justification be a judicial act of God, then that act originates in and from man's faith, and is the reward of faith.*

It is a principle of common sense, as it is a principle always taken for granted in the Bible, that the ground of a man's hope and expectation and dependence must com-

mand his will and mould his character. As long as he depends on himself, or has hope of delivering himself by his own exertions, so long will he hold and maintain the independence of his own will. He may do many things that are right,—many things that are honourable to himself and useful to others, and yet all the while it is not the will of God, but his own will that he follows. Nothing short of an absolute despair of delivering or helping himself at all can cut the roots of his self-will; and nothing short of an absolute dependence on God for everything can graft him on the root of God's will. Thus nothing but a true sense of the absolute unconditional gratuitousness of the gospel can write the law of God on the heart of man. And yet this doctrine of gratuitousness is opposed as if it were antinomian.

The true reason of the opposition is, that it opposes the pride of man. Man *therefore* opposes *it*. There is indeed something very striking in the perverse ingenuity with which man endeavours to dilute the medicinal virtue of the gospel. He *must* have *self* to lean on, and so when he is obliged to surrender *his own works* he

betakes himself to *his own faith* as his prop. But this is still *self;* and in whatever form it appears, as long as it is the ground of hope it must command the will. Surely this is the chief reason why the gospel contains so many evident declarations on the part of God, that beside Him there is no Saviour, and that man is absolutely incapable of doing anything in the work of his own redemption. Anything of man's *own* must be bad,—because the growing out from his own root is itself the original offence and disorder: he ought to be a branch, and not a separate plant. *Self*, in fact, is the great antinomian, *because* it is the great antichrist; where *self* acts, and tries to establish a claim to the forgiveness of sin, either by faith or by works, it incapacitates us for spiritual obedience, by cutting us off from the true source of spiritual life.

Thus we may in some measure understand how the very gratuitousness of the gospel may lead to its rejection; because this gratuitousness is, in fact, a declaration on the part of God that man can do nothing for himself, and is thus an offence to his pride. And not pride only, but every unholy feeling in the human heart is offended by the gospel.

For the Deliverer revealed in it is to destroy the works of the devil. Those who cleave to evil cannot welcome the gospel, for they cannot rejoice that evil is to be destroyed. Its destruction is the destruction of their hope and of their joy; and however much they may desire impunity, they cannot embrace *that* as good news, which tears their idol from them. Evil is "the strong man armed" holding their hearts and wills, their thoughts and desires, in captivity; and they cannot bear to hear of that stronger than he, who, by the proclamation of free forgiveness, would take his armour from him, and cast him out of his usurped hold in the heart.

God forgives, yet the man not forgiven.

Meanwhile, however, the true Deliverer stands at the door and knocks for admittance. His forgiving love is universal; and still it may with perfect propriety and consistency be said, that until man receives the forgiveness into his heart, *he is under condemnation.* He is excluded,—for he excludes himself,—from the only good and joy in the universe; he is away from the God of love, and thus is full of wrath, and encompassed with wrath; he is away from the God of light, and thus is in outer darkness; this is, and must be, his condition, until he ad-

mits the gospel into his heart. It is quite evident, therefore, that a man may be thoroughly and for ever miserable, although this pardon has been proclaimed to him; and that he can derive no possible benefit from it, until he believes it.

But when a poor sinner comes to know that God is his true friend, who has loved him with an everlasting love, and that evil is his real enemy, which has ruined him,—that God has a right to his whole heart, and to be the first and the last in all his ends and aims,—when he comes to know that evil is a usurper whose reign over him is a reign of injustice and darkness and hopelessness, this powerful persuasion within him opens the door of his heart; and he welcomes in the forgiveness, chiefly because with it and in it there comes that stronger than the strong man, who will cast out the usurper, and chase away his darkness and wrath and injustice and lies, and bring in a reign of righteousness.

Eternal life not given *for*, but in believing.

He expects no reward for admitting the deliverer into his heart, other than the blessedness of having this new and better reign within him. It is God's holy love which he receives, and into the enjoyment of that holy love he enters only by believing it.

When a man says, "I believe the gospel, and therefore I may hope that God will give me pardon and eternal life," we cannot but fear that he does not understand the meaning of the word; for if he really believed the gospel he would know that he had, even now, eternal life. Let me suppose the case of a mother, whose only child has been stolen from her in infancy, whose heart still bears the fresh and unclosed wound of her loss, and whose imagination is continually haunted with dark thoughts as to what the present condition and future fate of her child may be. I discover the child, and find it all that a mother's heart could desire; I come to her and say I have news for her, and that she will be richly rewarded if she believes them. I then tell her my news. Oh, reader! do you think she would ask me, what reward I meant to give her *for* believing?

The good which we receive from believing in the love of God, manifested in Christ Jesus, is analogous to that which we receive from believing in the worth and kindness of a human friend—only that the one is as nothing in comparison with the other. It is nothing else than the enjoyment of God

in Himself and in His creatures. It is not anything that we get on account of our loving Him, but it is the blessedness of loving Him, and knowing ourselves to be loved by Him. It is giving Him our perfect sympathy, and receiving His. It is knowing Him as the infinite God, and yet as an affectionate Father, as a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. It is the assurance which the heart draws from His love in giving His Son, that He will never leave us nor forsake us, that He will never cease to love us, with a love which will be, and must be, our satisfying and delighting portion through all eternity. It is the joyful and confident anticipation of the day when the mystery of God shall be accomplished, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and when the children of God shall be glad, and rejoice for ever in the new heavens and the new earth which their Father shall create. It is the discovering, that all the works of creation,—all events,—time and space,—eternity and infinity,—*everything* is full of that God who loved us, and gave Himself for us; and who, in giving us Himself, freely gives us all things. This is the good that a soul gets by believing the gospel; and shall

we still ask, whether we are warranted to *expect* pardon and eternal life *because we believe?* Does not such a question indicate a radical mistake as to the meaning of the gospel?

Let me repeat: If justification be a judicial act of God, imputing Christ's righteousness to believers,—and if this act has no existence until the gospel is believed, then justification is not *received by faith*, but *bestowed on account of faith*. It is a recompense for believing; and men are not blessed *in* the gospel itself, but *on account of* their belief of it. Whereas if justification means *the being made perfect as pertaining to the conscience, and having the conscience purged from dead works* (Heb. ix. 9), then all is simple; for we can have no difficulty in seeing that a sense of our own personal pardon and acceptance must arise out of a belief in that holy love of God which gave Christ to be a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. *This justification* is truly and intelligibly *by faith*, for it necessarily and naturally results from a belief of this love of God, revealed in the gift of His Son. But if we do not *understand* the atonement of Christ,—if we do not see in it such an expression of forgiving love, and such a recognition of the

Justification a state of mind arising out of faith.

evil of sin as may engage our confidence, and purge our consciences,—then our belief in the atonement can do us no good,—it does not justify us, it does not comfort nor strengthen us, it is to us a well without water. Thus, when no comfort is derived from the atonement itself, an endeavour is made to draw comfort from the *belief* of the atonement as an act to which God is supposed to have promised acceptance, and a special blessing. I see no warrant for this in the Bible. There are exceeding precious promises to those who trust in God, and wait on God; but the promise of pardon, as the reward of faith, seems to me a mere human invention, in direct opposition to the whole tenor of the gospel.

It is evident, from Rom. v. 1, that justification is necessarily connected with peace of conscience,—"being justified by faith, we have peace with God;"—now pardon, unknown or unbelieved, will not, and cannot, give peace of conscience. Justification, then, is not pardon simply, but pardon known and believed,—pardon implied in and inferred from a gift greater than pardon. Rom. iii. 20: "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be *justified*, for by the law is the *knowledge*

of sin." The knowledge of sin, or the sense of sin, is placed in direct antithesis to justification, which therefore ought to mean *a sense of deliverance from sin.* The deeds of the law in this passage appear to me to mean the expiatory and purifying rites of the Mosaic law. And when the apostle says of them that no flesh shall be justified by them, for by the law is the knowledge of sin, he presents to us the same idea which is more fully explained in the Epistle to the Hebrews, chap. ix. and x., viz., that these rites were intended to awaken such a sense of sin as should make pardon a needed blessing. They removed ceremonial pollution, but they could give *no real peace to the conscience,* except by pointing the worshipper to that great sacrifice of which they were only shadows. The law, in its addresses to those who are under it, always supposes them to be sinners, *i.e., under condemnation.* It knows nothing and teaches nothing about *that new life* which is communicated by Christ to those who come to Him, and which *is not under condemnation.* The law supposes men always to be growing out of a root which is under the condemnation of death. The gospel reveals a fountain *of*

new life in Christ Jesus, which *cannot fall under condemnation*, because it is the life of God,—and this is the fountain to which all are invited.[1]

The same truth is taught in the Epistle to the Hebrews, ix. 9-14: "Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to

[1] The truest interpretation of the expression "justification by faith," is the condition of a man who is "set right" with God by the assurance that His purpose in all His dealings with him is "not to destroy but to correct;" that is, not to inflict present suffering as retribution, but to train him by suffering into a participation in His own holiness.

the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God?" Chap. x. 1, 2: "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices, which they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect: for then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins." Verses 19-22: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."

From these passages I am led to infer, that the faith of the gospel attaches to and takes hold of the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, as including and implying in it the pardon of sin, and thus delivers the con-

science from the sense of unpardoned sin. And I am also led to infer, that this deliverance from the sense of unpardoned sin, by the knowledge that a propitiatory sacrifice has been made, is just another expression for justification by faith, because similar effects are ascribed to them both, viz., "peace with God," and "boldness" and "full assurance" before him. Man, in order to his true well-being, must walk with God, and must depend on him; he cannot and dare not do this, whilst he feels the weight of unpardoned sin on his conscience; but when his soul hears the good news, that through Christ the forgiveness of sin is preached, that is, proclaimed to us (see Acts xiii. 38), then he can look on God as his Father, and dares to depend on Him, and to expect great things from Him. He may then "draw near with a true heart and full assurance of faith," and ask and receive the blessing.

I know that all who are really taught of God will feel themselves debtors to His mercy alone, whatever their theory may be. But even those whose true feeling may save them from the full effect of their erroneous

Darkness caused by the thought, "we are saved *on account of* our faith."

theories, may be much perplexed and hindered by them. And assuredly there are many who do really consider their faith as the fulfilment of a condition by which they are entitled to pardon and eternal life. Of course, when these persons wish to confirm their assurance of salvation, they look to the accuracy, or to the unquestioning submission of their faith, and endeavour to persuade themselves, that because they believe aright, God will give them eternal life. They remember the words, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," —and they say, We believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, therefore we shall be saved. If misgivings arise, they endeavour to encourage themselves with the inference, that as they have not doubted the Christian doctrines, they *must* be within the pale of that covenant which promises all things to faith; but I am confident that such reasonings never can give peace to a really awakened conscience.

The moral sense refuses such comfort. To a moral and thinking being it cannot but appear strange that God should pardon him *because he believes something.* It gives such an unintelligible and unedifying

idea of the Divine character—an idea which never can impress the mind with holy feelings or affections or desires. And when the hour of weakness and apprehension comes,—when he feels himself on the brink of the unseen eternity,—will he then be able to draw comfort from this dry cistern, "that he has believed certain doctrines"?—Is it not more likely that he will begin anxiously to inquire whether his faith has been of the right kind? If it had been so, would it not have had a more sanctifying influence on his conduct through life, and would it not now impart greater peace?

I can conceive nothing more melancholy than the situation of a man lying on his death-bed, with all the rich treasures of the gospel in his view, but not seeing how he is to connect himself with them. He reads in the Bible the assurances of God's everlasting love, and of the gift of eternal life, but he does not see these treasures as his own, he asks what and where is the link which unites a sinner to them?—An inquiry how full of agony when death is evidently not many hours distant! He is told that faith is the link which unites the sinner to the promises, and he looks within to see whether

his faith is right, but cannot tell whether it is or is not. His perplexity rises above his strength or endurance, and his agitation makes it impossible for him to know or examine what the state of his belief is.

Would it not be a blessed relief to that soul to be assured that Christ died, not for believers, but for the world,—that He was promised as a deliverer before there was one penitent or believing thought in any human breast,—and that when He did appear on earth, He said of Himself, that He came "to seek and to save that which was lost,"—that His invitation was, "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest"?

Would it not be good tidings of great joy to be told that through Christ Jesus God is reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing unto them their trespasses;—that He has tasted death for every man—that He, the righteous one, is our advocate with the Father—that He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world—that thus the full pardon is already resting on him before he had thought of asking it; and that all which now remains is to bless God for His unspeakable gift, and to ask for the Spirit of

Christ to open his understanding and his affections to appreciate the gift and use it?

These good tidings are proclaimed to the whole world, and when the poor man believes them he will be *justified by faith*—that is, he will have the sense of pardon and acceptance before God,—and will trust in Him as in a Father who pitieth His own children. Before he believed this, he was indeed one of that world which God so loved as to give His Son to die for it; but till he *believed* in it he could not be *justified;* his conscience remained unpurged, he had no child-like confidence in God, he had no share in eternal life.

Our hope lies in what God is, not in what we are.

There is something very satisfying in this way of drawing hope and encouragement from what God is, and not from what we ourselves are, in drawing hope for the future from His past acts and expressions of love. It is connected very intimately with the spirit of dependence, and it is a style of thought and feeling which seems to me to run through the whole Bible, and to be its peculiar characteristic. Let me give some examples of it.

When our Lord asked water from the

woman of Sychar at Jacob's well, she reminded him of the dissensions between the Jews and the Samaritans as a reason which ought to have prevented him from making such a request. He answered, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water" (John iv.) The Jew refuses water to the Samaritan, and the Samaritan to the Jew—but such is not the manner of God. His love is free and boundless, giving to all men liberally and upbraiding not. If she had known the fulness of that love; if she had known that He who spoke to her was Himself the great gift of God to a lost world, and the dispenser of all other gifts; she would have made another use of this interview, and instead of speaking of the quarrels of men, would have asked for the blessing of God; "thou wouldest have asked, and he would have given thee living water." There is something unspeakably touching in that simple expression. He seems to regard His giving as the natural consequence of her asking; and it is so, for the gift is already given, and the creature's asking is merely the opening of the heart to

admit a love which has been long waiting at the door.

This argument for present confidence and future hope, drawn from past kindness, pervades the Old Testament as well as the New. I may mention one beautiful example of it in the 51st chapter of Isaiah. As the prophet is contemplating the fallen state of Israel, he thus draws encouragement from the former dealings of God in their behalf, —"Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord! Art thou not it which hath cut Rahab (Egypt), and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried up the fountains of the great deep, and made a way through the sea for the ransomed to pass over? *Therefore* the redeemed of the Lord *shall return*, and shall come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away." With what confidence does he draw his conclusion! He passes from the past deliverance to the future, as if the one necessarily grew out of the other. This is an argument worth a thousand syllogisms, for it speaks to the heart; and the only argument in religion that is worth anything is

Hope drawn from past experience.

that which does speak to the heart. I cannot but transcribe the words which follow. They are words which some sorrowful heart may be glad to read; for they are the words of Him who made the heart and sends it sorrow, and can make sorrow a greater blessing to it than joy. "I, even I, am he that comforteth you." Who need remain uncomforted when there is such a comforter? O taste and see that the Lord is gracious; blessed is the man that putteth his trust in Him.

This is the manner of the Bible; it tells us of the streams, that it may allure us to the Fountain; it tells of the past acts of God's faithful love, that we may be led to set our hope on God, and to feel assured that He who hath helped will help, and that He who hath loved will love unto the end. "God hath so loved the world, as to give His only begotten Son for it;" "and will He not with him freely give us all things?" It is impossible to doubt it. That great gift includes all others, for it is the gift of God Himself. It is not a stream from the fountain, but the fountain itself; the unsparing and inexhaustible fountain of eternal love. *And it is given to the world.*

Therefore, as each and every Israelite might take to himself encouragement and consolation from the past interpositions of God in behalf of his nation, so each and every child of man may draw rich and abundant encouragement and consolation from this past act of God's holy love in behalf of the world. And it is indeed a full fountain. It contains all other gifts, and is contained in them all,—it is their very spirit and life,—it gives them all their value, all their sweetness,—and without it they are empty husks. The selfishness of man's evil heart greedily seizes on the lower gifts, whilst it rejects the love of God contained in them, which is their very soul; and thus they become husks,—the husks on which the poor prodigals of the world are feeding.

The bread of our Father's house is the love of God in Christ Jesus, and there is enough of it, and to spare, and we might find it even enclosed in the outward gifts, if the mouth of our spirit were opened, as the mouth of our sense is; if the desire of our heart were after God, instead of being set on self-gratification. Does it not seem strange that such a Father should

have so many prodigals, and that the swine and the husks in this far country should be so much preferred to the society and the bread of our Father's house? It is not that the swine and the husks satisfy any one; they are seen by many in their true loathsomeness and emptiness, but *self* can live amongst them,—that is the secret,—whereas a man must renounce self before he says in earnest, "I will arise and go to my father." *This* is the real bar which separates man from God, *for God's arms are open.*

The invitation to prayer a pledge of forgiveness.

It appears to me further, that the invitation to prayer is itself a pledge of forgiveness. And it will not be denied that the invitation to prayer is universal, that "whosoever will" may make use of it, that there is no limit but in the will of man. The proof of this contained in the words of Peter to Simon the sorcerer (Acts viii. 20-24) is very strong. The apostle tells him that he is in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity, and yet he desires him to pray.

Some of my readers may recollect an anecdote told of Buonaparte, which, whether it be founded on fact or not, in some degree illustrates my meaning. When the

Duc d'Enghien was apprehended, it is said that he begged much for a personal interview with Buonaparte. This, however, Buonaparte decidedly refused; and being afterwards asked his reason for doing so, he replied, "I should have been obliged to pardon him if I had admitted him, and I had resolved that he should die." Hear what this unjust judge saith; he would have considered the reluctantly granted admission of his victim into his presence as inferring a pardon,—surely then a pressing invitation to come into his presence would have been considered as still more strongly inferring a pardon. If that hard man felt thus, what shall we conclude from the invitations of Him who willeth not the death of the sinner, but that all should turn and live?—of Him who said, "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest"?

Is it said that only the prayer of faith is heard? True; but every real prayer is a prayer of faith. It is not, and cannot be, a prayer at all, without the belief that "God is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." We may pray for faith; we may pray for the spirit of prayer;

we may pray for the waiting eye, and the spirit hungering and thirsting after righteousness; we may pray for the first elements of Christian light and feeling, just as well as for the communications of heavenly joy, and the greatest advancements in the Divine life. But the first breathing or cry of the heart after these things implies faith.

And such prayers, moreover, if real, are prayers in the name of Christ, because they are prayers for the accomplishment of that work which Christ came from heaven to do. The name of God is not the word *God*, but His revealed character; and the name of Christ is the Divine character revealed in Christ,—the character of holy love,—consuming sin, and thus saving the sinner. He came to destroy the works of the devil,—*this is His name*,—and a prayer against the works of the devil is a prayer in His name, being according to the will and counsel of God revealed in him. This seems to be the meaning of that frequently recurring expression, "in the name of Christ." When the heart goes along with the declared purpose of God, to eradicate evil, and bring in the reign of righteousness, it prays in the name

of Christ;[1] it lives and moves and has its being in that name.

Prayer seems to imply faith in an open ear and a forgiving heart; when God commands prayer, is He not thereby declaring Himself to be the hearer of prayer and the forgiver of sins?

The true conception of forgiveness lifts the soul out of itself;

It appears to me that this view of pardon, as being a manifestation of the Divine character in Christ Jesus, altogether independent of man's belief or unbelief, is a view much fitted to draw the soul from self to God, and thus to sanctify, at the same time that it gives peace; because it presents a ground of hope entirely out of the soul itself, unchanged and unaffected by its fluctuating feelings, and because that ground is the holy God. It is not a pardon apart from God, but it is the holy God manifesting Himself in pardon. It represents the love of God as the one fountain out of which all comfort and strength, all hope and holiness are to be drawn; and it represents this fountain as perfectly and absolutely

[1] At a later period the author would have given a more definite meaning to this expression. He would have said it was prayer in the spirit of *filial* trust.

open and accessible to all the children of men at all times. Whereas when a man thinks that he is not pardoned until he believes, he is almost necessarily drawn to *self*, and driven to seek comfort in the actings of his own mind; and as he does not conceive himself entitled to draw water out of that fountain of holy love until he has satisfactorily answered to himself the question, "Do I believe?" so, after he has answered it, he is tempted to consider the water to be the reward of his belief.

and places obedience on the right foundation.

A second important advantage attends this way of stating the subject. Whilst pardon is conceived to depend upon faith, and is thus confounded with eternal life, it is very difficult to press the warnings and precepts and exhortations of the Bible, as the Bible itself presses them. People reason thus:—If pardon and eternal life are proclaimed gratuitously, what place is left for obedience? How can the preacher urge it as absolutely necessary, without some inconsistency in his plan of instruction?

The usual way of escaping from the difficulty is to urge holy obedience as *an evidence* of the reality of faith; as if its value

consisted not in its own intrinsic worth as conformity to the will of God, and thus as being in itself eternal life to the soul, but merely in its proving the existence of faith and gratitude. We are exhorted "to love the Lord our God with all our heart;" upon the ground, that if we do not, we want an important evidence of the reality of our faith. Is this a worthy argument for urging men to the exercise of that high and holy privilege, that blessed commandment, on which "hang all the law, all the prophets," may we not add, all the gospel? Must not there be a radical error in that system which reduces many a faithful servant of God to such an argument?

The *whole use of the gospel* is to introduce the holy love of God into man's heart, that it may work there its own likeness. But the gospel cannot enter the heart without being believed, and here is the *whole use of faith.* The duty of the creature to love the Creator, and the other creatures of that Creator for His sake, ought to be pressed as flowing necessarily from our relation to Him and His goodness to us,—as constituting the height of moral and spiritual perfection,—as being the very substance out of which all true blessedness is composed.

The end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned. Surely then it is more befitting that faith should be pressed and prized as producing holy love in the heart and life, than that love should be pressed as an evidence of faith.

There is a third reason which seems to me to recommend this view of pardon. When pardon is sought as an end, rather than as means to an end, it gives a contracted and mercenary tone to the mind. We are delivered from this mercenary feeling when we discern pardon to be not the end, but a means to the end, which is holiness. Forgiving love is the manna rained down from heaven on all our habitations; it is the daily bread on which the soul must feed, to strengthen itself for the daily work. When we receive it as such, then our natural language is—"What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits towards me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord." While we look on pardon as the ultimate object in religion, and not as a grace already bestowed, it is impossible that we can thus feed on it; yet unless we do so we can neither have peace nor strength.

CHAPTER IV.

Consideration of some passages of Scripture referring to the subject.

2 Cor. v. 19. —God the reconciler, not the reconciled.

BUT, it may be asked, are there not many passages in the Scriptures which seem decidedly to teach that forgiveness is bestowed only on those who believe in Jesus Christ? Let us examine some of these. Before doing so, however, let us consider attentively the general declaration contained in 2 Cor. v. 19, 20, 21: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing unto them their trespasses." I ought to observe that here, as indeed always in Scripture, God is spoken of as "reconciling"—never as "being reconciled." *To reconcile* is the act of an injured party who forgives; *to be reconciled* is the condition of one who has committed an offence, and has obtained forgiveness.[1]

[1] Thus our Lord says (Matt. v. 23, 24), "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest

In this passage God is represented as declaring a purpose of forgiveness to every individual in the world—as breathing out forgiveness to all (not imputing to men their trespasses)—in order that the world might be reconciled to Himself.

Immediately after the fall, He had made known His purpose of restoring the lost race through the instrumentality of the woman's seed. In the fulness of time the Deliverer came forth, and was declared to be no less than the only begotten of the Father,—the manifestation and expression of His nature,—full of grace and truth. Christ is thus not only the proof and pledge of Divine love, but is also the appropriate organ through which that love may be dispensed to sinners. God manifested in Christ, therefore, is God revealed as the holy and gracious forgiver of sins. This is His attitude. All who see Him in this attitude must believe in His forgiving love.

But sin hides the forgiving character of God from us; the accusations of conscience

that thy brother hath ought against thee (hath ground of complaint against thee), leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way; first *be reconciled* to thy brother (obtain his forgiveness), and then come and offer thy gift."

raise a cloud between God and the sinner. The forgiving love of God being manifested in the life and death of Christ, declares itself to be a consuming fire to evil, and thus no heart which does not sympathize with the threatened destruction of evil, can possibly embrace cordially, or enjoy fully, the forgiveness of the gospel. So long, therefore, as a man chooses to keep his sin, so long he refuses to allow the forgiving love of God to enter his heart. In such circumstances, although God remains the same,—although He is still, as Luther calls Him, "the merciful forgiver of the sins of all men,"—yet the man can have no real peace, no true sense of forgiving love; and if he continues in this state through eternity, he must through eternity be a child of wrath, abiding in outer darkness. Therefore, when the light of God's reconciling countenance is first perceived shining through these veils and clouds and obstacles, although the forgiving love has been always the same, yet the man may be said to be *then first pardoned*, because he then *first admits* or accepts the pardon. When one man loves another, that other is loved, whether he accepts the love bestowed on him or not. In like manner,

when God in Christ forgives the world, the world is forgiven, whether it accepts the pardon or not. But as in the first case the refuser of human kindness receives no joy and no benefit from it, though it has been bestowed, so, in the second case, those who understand not—or refuse to accept—God's pardon, receive no joy,—no benefit from it, though it also has been bestowed. When the Saviour came into the world, St. John tells us, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not; but as many as received him, to them gave he power to become sons of God, even to them who believed in his name." He came to the *world*, and pardon was and is proclaimed in him. Those who receive him receive the pardon in him; those who do not receive him do not receive the pardon. See also 1st John v. 11, 12.

Let us now proceed to examine some of the passages which appear to represent pardon as a gift bestowed upon believing, or upon being baptized.

Acts iii. 19. "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the pre-

sence of the Lord." Leave, therefore, your false notions of God, and be converted to that true view of His character which blots out sin and assures of the forgiveness of sin (and thereby delivers from its power), that your sins may be found to be blotted out when the times of refreshing shall come, etc. (or, according to Schleusner), "especially now that the times of refreshing have come from the presence of the Lord, and that He hath sent Jesus Christ, who was before promised by the prophets."

That this interpretation of the latter clause is correct, appears to me quite evident, from the fact that it is the first and not the second coming of our Lord which is here referred to—for his second coming is separately mentioned in the 21st verse.

"To him give all the prophets witness, that whosoever believeth on him shall, through his name, receive the remission of sins." The word "receive" here has the same sense that it has in John i. 12, which has been already quoted: "He came to his own, and his own received him not," or *accepted* him not. He had *come* to them whether they received him or not, and so had the remission of sin; but those only

Acts x. 43.

who believed in his true character, viz., that he had come as a destroyer of the works of the devil, and as thus being a propitiation for the sins of the world, would in that very character of him read and receive their own forgiveness.

The next passage which I quote is still more distinct on the point—Acts xiii. 38, 39: "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is proclaimed unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." Here the forgiveness is declared to be universal, while the justification is limited to those who believe the proclamation; that is, they only who *receive* the unspeakable gift are *justified*;—they only have their consciences purged of guilt, and are delivered from the burden of unpardoned sin.

And I cannot but think that Abraham's justification was of the same kind. In Gen. xii. we read that God said to him, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: and I will make of thee a great nation; and in thee shall all

families of the earth be blessed." Relying on this promise, Abraham went forth as a stranger and pilgrim towards the land of promise, but his faith was still very imperfect, for we find that when God appeared to him some time after and said to him, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward," his only answer was, "Lord God, what wilt thou give me? Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in mine house is mine heir." On this God renews the promise. "He brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now towards heaven, and tell the stars if thou be able to number them. And He said, So shall thy seed be." And then it is added, "he believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness."

Now if we suppose that God rewarded the greatness of Abraham's faith by imputing to him righteousness, then we must also suppose that his acceptance is "no more of grace, but of debt." And if we decline this interpretation as being contrary to the whole tenor of the gospel, and to the express commentary of St. Paul on the subject (Romans iv.), what other explanation can we adopt but that which has been suggested, viz., that from the greatness of God's kindness, mani-

fested in His promises to him, he had learned to look up to God with filial confidence, and that God declared this state of filial confidence to be what He regards as the righteousness of man?

We shall now consider some passages of a different kind; such as, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" and "He that believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." With regard to such passages, I have to observe, that salvation and eternal life are things quite different from pardon, just as a medicine is different from the health which is produced by its application. Salvation is the healing of spiritual disease, and eternal life is the communication of the life of God to the soul. These blessings are brought to man by the knowledge of God entering into him, and abiding in him, and giving him a participation in the Divine nature. The saving knowledge of God is the knowledge of Him as revealed in Christ, the forgiver of sin, and it can only enter into him by being believed.

This doctrine, then, of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, is the medicine and nourishment of the soul; faith is

taking this medicine, and feeding on this nourishment. Salvation, sanctification, heaven, eternal life, are different names for the spiritual health and strength and enjoyment, which are the blessed effect of receiving this spiritual medicine and this spiritual nourishment. Therefore, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," Acts xvi. is not a nostrum nor a magical amulet, but a declaration of the way to obtain spiritual health. The Philippian jailer had been arrested by the voice of Paul, when in the very act of plunging into eternity. He now looked back on what had happened with the feelings of a man who in the morning contemplates the full extent of a danger through which he has passed unconsciously during the night,—he lived the danger over again, and felt the fear. His arm had been stopped and his life saved by the voice of the men whom he had thrust into the inner prison. He must have known that it was for preaching a new religion that these prisoners, after having had many stripes laid upon them, had been committed to him by the magistrates, with a special charge of safe custody, and he knew that he had not softened his charge in the execution of it.

It was a remarkable night. Nature, or the God of Nature, seemed to take part with the prisoners, and to protest against the wrong done to them; there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken, all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed; he was awakened by the commotion, and when about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners were fled, he was saved by St. Paul's assurance that they were all there. As his agitated mind hastily contemplated and compared these striking things, he seems to have been led to connect them all with the new God whose claims and authority these men had been asserting.

Under these impressions he came trembling, and fell before down Paul and Silas, saying, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" and they replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." And then it is added "they spake unto him the word of the Lord;" that is, they explained to him the gospel,—they told him who Jesus Christ was, and for what he had come into this world. This was absolutely necessary; for these words, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt

be saved," however full of meaning to one who knows the gospel, yet if spoken alone and without a commentary, must have been absolutely unintelligible to a Macedonian jailer, who knew nothing at all about Jesus Christ. Pressed by his fears, he might have answered to such an address, "I will believe anything;" but would this have been pleasing to Him who desires reasonable service; or could the jailer have been enlightened or benefited in any way by such a faith, or rather such superstitious credulity?

Paul must have told him that the God of heaven and earth, the Holy One, who cannot look upon iniquity, *yet* looks with a father's love on this lost world; yea, that He has so loved them as to give His Son to die for them; that Jesus Christ is this Son—the image of the invisible God, the manifestation of His holy love; and that through him a full and free forgiveness is proclaimed to every man, and access to God, as to a loving Father and the Hearer of prayer, is laid open to every man.

We may suppose the jailer then asking, "But is there anything that I have to do in order to entitle me to a participation

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in these privileges and blessings?" And Paul answers, "No—nothing; all you have to do is immediately to use them and enjoy them." If you believe this history of God's love, you will not doubt of His forgiveness to yourself, you will know that wherever you are, you have an Almighty friend who will never leave you and never forsake you, you will ask of Him and He will give you living water, which will bathe your heart with gladness, and purify you even as He is pure. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

Our ground of security is, not "I believe," but "God has forgiven me."

I think that much obscurity has arisen from considering these words, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," as containing in themselves a statement of the gospel. This remark may be thought hypercritical, but I am persuaded of its importance. Only consider: If the gospel really consists in this proclamation, then to believe the gospel is "to believe that those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved." "Well," one may say, "I believe that those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved;" but then, another question arises, "Do I myself

believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? If so, I am saved; if not, I am not saved." Then comes a doubt, "Have I any evidence of the sincerity of my faith? Have my actings proved it? Have I not been unfaithful to my light?" It is quite clear that the mind cannot find firm footing in this way: It is an unravellable perplexity. But suppose the result of the inquiry to be, "Yes, I am sure that I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ;" then I say that, drawing his hope from the fact of his faith, he is as far from the spirit of the gospel as the man who rests his hope on his alms-deeds. Whenever anything in myself is the source of my comfort, I am sure that I am drawing from an empty cistern. It is not in the nature of things that I should be able to draw peace or strength or holiness from knowing that I believe a fact, however true and important that fact may be. The fact itself may be a comfort to me; but not my knowing that I believe it. *The gospel is not* "he that believeth shall be saved," *but* "Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins."

Let the reader thoughtfully compare these

two statements, and judge between them. If the first be true, then the gospel consists simply in a premium to faith. If the second, then it consists in a manifestation of the unutterable love of God to man. In the first case, the belief is that a promise has been made to *faith*, and therefore none can draw comfort from it, except those who *know they have the true faith.* In the second case, the belief is that God forgives sinners, and through Christ announces this to sinners, and *this* belief will give comfort to all who know that they are sinners, and desire deliverance from sin.

I hope that I have made my meaning clear; for the error which I am opposing seems to me very general, and a great source of disquietude. There are many who, when seeking for peace, inquire rather "Have I believed?" than what is there to be believed? "Has God indeed forgiven the sins of the whole world?" Yet surely *this* is the question: and, blessed be God, the answer rests on the unchangeableness of God, and does not vacillate according to the high or low spirits of a weak mortal. "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that

will by nó means clear the guilty."—*This is His name for ever;* "and they who know His name will put their trust in Him, for He never faileth them that seek Him." This name of God is the strong tower into which the righteous fleeth and is safe.

Reader, art thou in this strong tower? How wouldst thou feel, if it were now said to thee, by a voice which thou couldst not mistake nor gainsay—This night thy soul shall be required of thee? Oh, my brother! thy God loveth thee, and hath given His Son for thee, so unquenchable is His love. He hath said, Look unto me and be saved,—Come unto me, and I will give thee rest. *The love* from which these gifts and promises and words of kindness flow is the strong tower. Wilt thou not flee into it? It is the one thing needful: that tower is the secret place of the Most High, the shadow of the Almighty; if thou art abiding in it, although thou hast no earthly friend nor refuge nor comfort, yet thou art safe, for nothing can separate thee from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus; and even if thou hast hitherto received the grace of God in vain, that grace is still lying at thy door, and begging for

admittance. Fear not, therefore: "Open thy mouth wide, and He will fill it."

And let no one be alarmed by hearing that it is "the righteous" who flee into this tower; as if they must become righteous before they can have a right to flee into it. The sinner is invited to flee into this strong tower; and he becomes righteous in doing so.

"This *is* life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." Eternal life is not given as a premium for knowing God; the knowledge of God as revealed in Christ *is eternal life.* God is light, and the knowledge of God is a ray of that light, and the soul into which it enters becomes a partaker of the Divine nature.

We may have an atheistical knowledge of Christianity, as I have before observed. That is, we may receive its doctrines, without receiving the God of the doctrines, just as the philosophers of this world receive the doctrines of natural science, without thinking of or receiving the God of nature, or as men are continually receiving the events of life, without receiving the God who manifests Himself in them. And there-

fore it is most necessary to bear continually on our minds that it is *God with whom we have to do, and not a science.* The doctrines of revelation are the manifestations of that ever-present Almighty God, in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways. They are lights to guide us back to God, our long-lost heavenly Father, and if they serve not this purpose, they serve no purpose. They are channels through which His Spirit, which is our life, may be received into the heart; and if they bring not this Spirit, they do nothing.

CHAPTER V.

Sympathy with the mind of God.

Two fields of Christianity.

CHRISTIANITY has two fields; the one is the infinite and unchangeable character of God—the other is the heart of man: the first is all light—original, uncreated light; the second in itself is all darkness—but it is created with a capacity of receiving light. The great object of Christianity is to dispel the darkness of the second field, by introducing into it the light of the first.

A man may know that there is light in God, and he may acquire some ideas concerning the colour and the qualities of the rays of that light, and yet be unvisited by a single ray. He may know about it, as a blind man may know about material light. And all the while, though he reasons about it, he has it not—he is in darkness.

But why is the heart of man dark? Surely

it was not so when God pronounced it good. No, it was then light; but it was light merely and solely because it was then open to receive the light of God. The creature *must* be darkness when separated from the Creator—when shut against Him; and man has separated himself from God, and shut out His light, and never can have light again, until he opens his heart to receive the light of God. As easily may the eye create light for itself, independent of the sun, as the soul of man create light for itself, independent of God. There is no light for man but in God; if He is not in thee, my brother, the light that is in thee is darkness.

The natural sun entering upon the polar regions, which have been locked up in the death and frost and darkness of their long winter, and filling all things with light and life and warmth, is but a feeble emblem of the entrance of the Sun of Righteousness on the cold, dead, dark regions of the human heart. The human heart, apart from God, is a land of darkness, as darkness itself, inhabited by lies and vain imaginations, and lying under the shadow of death; it is a chaos and a terror to itself, whenever it can look upon itself. But no sooner does that

sun enter, no sooner does the dead heart drink in His quickening beams, than it revives; it finds that the light is life,—the darkness and the fear and the frozen death are past; a new principle of life is imparted; the cold and torpid heart opens its rigid and shrunken veins to receive the life-blood and the quickening influences which flow from Him who is the heart and the head of the spiritual universe; it finds that that light is love, and that that uncreated, all-embracing, and omnipotent love, is its own joyful and satisfying portion through all eternity. "Surely the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun."

To know God is to sympathize with Him.

Each revealed perfection of God, as it enters the heart of man, goes to form a part of the Christian character, and is necessary to the filling up of that character. The perfected character is a cordial, delighted, intelligent sympathy with the whole revealed will of God. But we must know God in order thus to sympathize with Him; for we cannot sympathize with what we neither know nor believe in. We may know and believe many things without sympathizing with them; but no man can know or believe in God

without sympathizing with Him. He who does not know God as the light and the life and the portion of his soul knows Him not; and he who knows this cannot but sympathize with Him.

"This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent;" that is, to know God as He is revealed in Christ,—to know Him in His relation to sinners. It is to know His purpose of destroying the works of the devil through the work of the Redeemer; to know the tenderness of His love, and its freeness; to know Him as the prodigal knew his father, when he felt his arms about him; and at the same time to know that the grand object of this love is the eradication of evil.

"This is *life*," saith the faithful and true Witness; it is a living principle, and not a mere notion; it is a participation in the life of God; it is an indwelling of the Spirit of God. The Saviour complained, "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life." There was but one life, and one Dispenser of that life in the whole universe, yet they would not come to him for it. Oh! if they had known the gift of God, and who it was that offered it to them, they would

have asked, and he would have given them eternal life.

Life eternal does not consist in knowing that there is a God and that there is a Saviour; but in acquaintance with God and with the Saviour. In knowing Him, as a child knows his father, as a friend knows his friend. When man discovers that his Creator, the fountain of eternity, the fountain of his being and of all being —in whom and by whom he lives and thinks and feels—who pervades and sustains his soul and his body in all their parts—who ever is, and ever must be essentially present in every faculty and capacity of his nature,—without whom nothing lives, nothing happens, nothing is done through all worlds —in whom, as in their one root, all the varieties of things are united, and from whom, as from their one root, they all grow —when he discovers that this great One, this Mystery which contains and binds in and animates the universe, has a love for him passing thought as well as utterance, a love which led Him to take on Himself the human nature, that in it He might reveal Himself to man—when he discovers that this revelation was made that we might live for

ever in the knowledge and fellowship of His holy love—dwelt in by Him, and animated by His Spirit, and filled with His fulness,—oh! then the darkness is past and the true light is come. We have found the pearl of eternity, the pearl of great price, and know the meaning of that word, "He that hath the Son hath life;" we have found the pearl, and for joy thereof we go and sell all that we have and buy it.

The meaning of "Sell all that thou hast."

The pearl is a free gift! What then is meant by saying that the merchant-man who had found it went and *sold all that he had* and *bought* it? The meaning is, that there is no room for it in a heart which is filled with other things;—he who would possess it must make room for it, It is not and cannot be enjoyed unless it occupies the whole heart. It must be the first and the last,—the sole object of the thoughts and affections and desires.

The pearl of great price is eternal life—it is the love of God reigning in the heart. Now eternal life has no fellowship with a sensual, selfish, worldly life, and the love of God cannot reign in the heart whilst *self* reigns there, disposing of

the affections according to its will. What we have to sell, therefore, is *self;* self must be given up in order to possess the pearl. Whilst self continues to be the dominant principle within us, we may hear of God by the hearing of the ear—we may read and reason and talk about Him—we may have our feelings and imaginations strongly excited by the ideas which we have formed of Him, but He is not *our* God, He is not the portion of our souls. There is no room for Him there, as there was no room for Him in the inn when He was born into our nature and our world.

Yet let no one think that his business is *first* to cast out self, and *then* to look for this pearl; the knowledge of its value is the power in the hand of God by which self, the strong man armed, is cast out—the *only* power which can do so. They who know the *name* of God will put their trust in Him—they who know the value of the pearl will sell all that they have and buy it. But they who know not the *name* of God cannot trust in Him, and they who know not the value of the pearl cannot part with anything so dear as *self*, in order to make room for it. They keep self, and in keeping self, they refuse the pearl.

Is *self* then still reigning in us? Let us not deceive ourselves with vain words. In this case we have yet neither part nor lot in the matter, and our religion is nothing else than Simon's traffic, who wished to purchase the Holy Ghost, in order to flatter and pamper self. Whilst we continue thus we are strangers to the covenant of promise—we are without home, or hope, or God in the world.

And yet the love of God is still resting on us, the ear of God is still open to our cry, and the sighing of the prisoner comes before Him: He waiteth to be gracious, and He delighteth in mercy. Nevertheless the danger is imminent, for every hour of delay strengthens self, and confirms the opposition of the heart against God. Let us consider how we shall estimate the pearl when we come to die, and how we shall estimate self. Do we not know well that at that hour we shall be ready to give ten thousand times ten thousand worlds, if we had them, for one smile of the face of God, for one good hope of eternal life. And if such a smile and such a hope be worth so much at that hour, why should they be less worth at this hour? For be assured that however the things

that are seen may, for a time, veil unseen realities, it was for these you were created, and nothing lower can satisfy the cravings of your being. And certainly the hour is not far off when thou wilt know this. Oh, then, is there any madness equal to the madness of neglecting the soul and the favour of God, and spending thy short uncertain hour here in treasuring up for thyself regrets and fears against the day of the revelation of the judgment of God? Is it not madness in an immortal being to leave eternity entirely out of his account of existence, when, in truth, it is the only thing in his existence which is worth thinking of? Neglect not the pearl, for it is a pearl of GREAT PRICE.

Man's misery and its cure.

The appeals made by God to every man, through the occasional misgivings of conscience and the appointments of providence, and especially through that sense of the weariness and unsatisfactoriness of life which forces itself upon him when he is not under the immediate exciting influence of some particular object, are all urgent invitations to seek for that good in the Creator which has in vain been sought for in the creature.

Why is the world such a scene as it is? Why is life such a scene? Think for a moment of the loathsome sin and misery which cover the crowded population of our cities, and overspread immense regions of the earth. It is a festering and putrifying evil, which defies all human skill and power and benevolence to cure it. And think of the better regulated sin and the better disguised misery which poison the more decent or the more refined portions of humanity. The bitter root of all this is that *self* which has taken the place of God in man's heart.

There is no common centre wherein men may be united to each other, for all worship each one his own *self*, so that there are as many centres as there are individuals. And there is no true order in the individual any more than in the race, for the spiritual keystone is gone. The one common centre of men is God. Love to Him is the only common principle which can unite them to each other. And as God is the common centre of the whole spiritual universe, so He is the keystone of the arch in each individual spirit. The fool who "hath said in his heart, There is no God," has chosen as his portion a restless

misery within, and a tumultuous strife without. Is not this the world's condition? Whither can we turn for hope and consolation in such circumstances but to our Creator? Our revolt from Him is the very spring and source of the evil; our cure lies only in our return to Him. Oh that each heart might hear and answer to the call, "Return unto Me, for I have redeemed you." "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth."

We must *look*, we must *believe*, we must *receive the truth of God*, else we cannot be saved. Salvation does not consist in the removal of punishment, but in the willing acceptance of it—in dying unto self and living unto God—in being made one with the Father and the Son—in being made partakers of the same mind, the same will, the same spirit with God. Salvation is God's truth abiding richly and efficiently in the soul, and how can truth enter the heart but by being believed? Salvation is thus by faith, and by faith alone; that is, it is the effect produced on the heart by the truth and love of God believed in.

Sanctification and salvation are one thing.

The great High Priest prays thus—"Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." Knowledge is truth in the understanding; sanctification is truth in the will and the affections,—choosing and estimating and loving things according to truth. But truth can enter the will and the affections only through the understanding. Therefore it is that our souls are "sanctified through the truth." Why salvation comes by faith.

Christianity simply reveals the truth of our relation to God, there is nothing *arbitrary* in it. We are not called upon to believe anything merely for the sake of believing it, or merely in obedience to the command of a Being more powerful than ourselves, on whose arbitrary good pleasure our happiness depends. Christianity explains the true relation between the Creator and the creature. It ascribes the evil that is in the world to the breach of that relation on the part of the creature, and declares the means by which God proposes to heal the breach, and to bring out of this foul stain a higher manifestation of His own character, and a higher holiness and happiness to the restored race, as well as to all the rest of the spiritual family. Through the intelligent belief of

this we enter into sympathy with the mind and will and purposes of God; and thus faith is the natural and necessary means by which man is reunited to God;—for reunion with God and a renewed sympathy with His will and purposes are one and the same thing.

"Sanctify them *through thy truth*—thy word is truth." Truth is the instrument, but it is the God of truth who works. In fact the "Word," understood in its highest signification, implies this. It is not truth to our souls till God is discerned in it. Whilst the truth lies in our minds as a mere knowledge or system of theology, it cannot profit us—it is a body without a soul; not that it is this in itself, but it is so to us, so long as we do not make it a channel of communion with God. If we would have our souls really fed by the word we must get it fresh from the mouth of God Himself, and we must get it daily, for like the manna in the wilderness it will not keep. We must receive it in the spirit of dependence. We must ask for it till He gives it,—we must open our mouths wide till He fills them.

"Sanctify them through thy truth;" thus

our High Priest prayed whilst on earth, and prays still without ceasing; and it is sweet, when the soul is dry and comfortless, and cannot pray with any fervour of feeling, to sit down at His feet, and say Amen to His prayer. Oh! what high things will the soul hear that sits there, and with what high things will its Amen mingle? Hear some of them,— "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee; that they also may be one in us. And the glory which Thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as We are one. I in them, and Thou in me; that they may be made perfect in one." "Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory," and "that the love wherewith Thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." He who prays thus is the Son whom the Father heareth alway— and who is "Head over all things to his Church." Will not the soul that hears this say with David, "Who am I, and what is my house? and what can I say more unto Thee? yet now, O Lord God, Thou art that God, and Thy words are true, and Thou

hast promised this goodness unto Thy servant, and now, O Lord God, the word that Thou hast spoken concerning Thy servant, establish it for ever, and do as Thou hast said."

It is very profitable and delightful to read the Psalms in this same spirit, regarding them as the confessions and prayers and praises and hopes and assurances, which the great High Priest presents to the Father in the name of his church. The soul that joins in this worship of the upper sanctuary *must* pray with confidence,—it cannot doubt of an answer,—it knows that it has the petitions which it asks, because it asks according to the will of God, and through the mouth of the all-prevailing Intercessor. This is indeed profitable for the soul, for thus it learns a holy familiarity with heaven, —it becomes one of that great multitude which no man can number,—and as it sees and feels more of the privilege of being united to Christ and to his body, it learns more and more to loathe the contractedness and littleness of self and individuality, and to pant after a full participation in that free spirit, which is the Spirit of God, and the quickening breath of the universal family.

CHAPTER VI.

Thoughts suggested by the foregoing Remarks.

PERHAPS some of my readers, as they look back on the views which I have been laying before them, may refer to this very chapter (John xvii.) from which I have been making these most comforting quotations, as a complete refutation of what I have said concerning the universality of the love of God. For in that prayer our Lord only prays for such as either were then, or should afterwards become, believers. But there is no inconsistency here. The circumstances of the disciples at the time, and the character of the prayer itself, fully explain this limitation.

Reason of the limitation in the prayer of John xvii.

The disciples were at that moment, without knowing it, on the very brink of a most tremendous event, which was to shake all their high hopes of their Master's suc-

cess, and which was at first sight to appear the complete triumph of the world over his cause. He had all along been forewarning them of this event, and particularly as it came near its accomplishment; their eyes were holden that they should not see the truth, yet he continued to prepare them for it. He at last distinctly told them that he was to suffer at the feast which was about to be celebrated; and when he sees their hearts dejected by the intelligence, he has recourse to another mode of encouragement and consolation. He prays in their hearing for them to the Father, and in his prayer he speaks as the high priest over the house of God above, and thus draws their thoughts and expectations past the present sorrow, and fixes them on that future triumph and glory which should be the consequence of his sufferings, and which should be for a praise and a rest and a joy to his people for ever and ever.

They were soon to stand in need of a very special and very strong consolation, and he gave it them; he let them know that he bore their individual names on his heart before his Father. They were soon to see him crucified by the world, and thence

would learn to dread the world as their own enemy; he therefore prayed for them, as distinct from the world, that they might be kept from the evil that is in the world. They knew that he had come to seek and to save the lost; but they needed, in this their extremity, something more precise, more special, more directly applicable to themselves, and he did not withhold it from them.

Therefore he began his intercession with a prayer for them individually, but he did not end it so; he proceeded, as high priest, to embrace all who should afterwards believe on him through their word. By doing this he gave to his then little flock an encouraging assurance that their numbers should be increased, whilst, at the same time, he bequeathed an enduring consolation to all who, at any period of the world, should put their trust in him. He does not in this prayer appear as the Saviour of sinners, but as the elder brother of his disciples, and as the head and high priest over the Church of God. All are invited to come into the temple, and the access is open to all, but the high priest intercedes only for those who have entered. The names and

titles of Christ are all relative. He is the *Shepherd* of his *sheep;* he is the *Head* of his *body;* he is the *High Priest* of his *church;* he is the *Saviour* of *sinners!* He came to seek and to save the lost; he came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. He invites all to come into the temple; but those who listen not to his call remain without, lost in the death of sin. They enter not into the Church of Christ; he is neither their Head nor High Priest. They have no part therefore in this intercession. Whilst those who do listen to him, and whose hearts are opened to receive his message of love, do in that very message receive a new life. His love becomes their life, they become members of his body, and partakers of that Divine life of which the fountain is in him. He is their head and representative with the Father; and as he is their righteousness, so he is their intercessor. He is not the Righteousness of those who do not believe in him, and this not from any unwillingness in him to be so, but because from the nature of the thing it is impossible. He *cannot* be the confidence of those who do not confide in him, neither can he be the nourishment of those who do not feed on him. So also

he is not the high priest of those who are not his people—of those who are not the members of his church and of his body. He cannot be the organ of those who are not partakers of his life; he cannot present the prayers of those who do not pray, nor the offerings of those who offer nothing. As the Saviour of sinners, he says, "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." As the Saviour also, he prays, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." But as the High Priest, he says, concerning his own disciples, "I pray *for them*, I pray not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me, for they are thine; and all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them." He is their organ of communication with the Father; they are one with him; their life is derived from him; their prayers are the breathings of his Spirit within them, which he presents with acceptance before the Father.

Let us not then lose the comfort or enjoyment of this prayer by supposing that it marks any limitation of the Saviour's love; it is not uttered by him as the seeker and saver of the lost, but as the organ of those

who are partakers of his life, and the members of his body. Let the believer read it with great joy, for it is now being made in his behalf; and it is always heard and always answered; and let the unbeliever, as he reads it, compare his own hopes for time and for eternity with the hopes of the least of those who are prayed for in it; and let him be urged to flee from wrath, and to take refuge in this ark of the covenant of love—this true temple of the living God; and let him understand that he has but to admit that love of God, which has been long knocking at the door of his heart, in order to his being himself admitted within this sacred enclosure.

Reader, ponder the last words of the prayer,—"O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee, but I have known Thee, and these have known that Thou hast sent me; and I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it, that the love wherewith Thou hast loved me, may be in them, and I in them." *You see that the great end and object of God's doings, and Christ's sufferings for man, is that the love of God,—that very love with which the Father loveth the Son, may be in man, and abide in him, and unite him to God for ever and ever.*

It was for this that Christ hath declared, and will declare—the name of God—His holy love—His unwearied compassion. Christ declares this name that it may become a new life in man—a life unsubject to sin, or sorrow, or death—a life which is nothing else than a stream flowing from—and continually supplied from—that eternal fountain of holy love which is in God. And this name is not declared that men may amuse themselves by talking about it or reasoning about it, but that—believing in it—they may be one with the Father and the Son. It is not by philosophy or speculation that we can know God, but by the desire of the heart after Him—by the opening of the heart to receive Him—by the spirit of prayer. "Except ye receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child ye shall in no wise enter therein." There is no true religion except the holy love of God abiding in the heart; and there is no heresy so great as the want of love. Thus alone can God be known, "he that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love."

I have often heard it asked, "Do you think that the belief of such or such a doc-

Knowledge and love of God are salvation—not belief in doctrines about God.

trine is essential to salvation?" This question always seems to me to indicate a mistake in the mind of the asker as to the nature of salvation. The heart which truly chooses God as its chief good *has* salvation; for salvation is the love of the heart for God on account of what He is. The faith which produces this love is saving faith; any faith which does not produce this love is not saving faith. But let no one mistake. It is quite possible to love a God, who after all may not be the true God, but a mere idol of the imagination. God has Himself told us in His Word what He is, and what He has done, so that we may know Him and love Him in His true character. If we love God for something that He is not,—as, for example, for a good-natured indifference whether His creatures are holy or not, we do not love the true God, but a lie. A true knowledge of God is necessary to a true love of God, and it is only a true love of God which can produce conformity to His will. The evil, then, of taking up a wrong doctrine, or a wrong view of a doctrine, does not lie in this,—that God punishes false doctrine, but in this,—that it frustrates the great purpose of revelation, viz., that the

love of God may abide in the heart of man, conforming his mind and will to the Divine mind and will.

"The world hath not known Thee, but I have known Thee." Oh, infinite blessed knowledge! And we may partake in it. "No man knoweth the Son but the Father, neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, *and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.*" The Son of God has declared his Father's name, and will declare it; we have not to ascend into heaven, nor to descend into the deep to find him; he is very nigh us, and he longs to reveal the Father, and to give us that knowledge which is life eternal.

It is through the Bible, read in the spirit of prayer, that this knowledge is chiefly communicated. Reader, do you believe that the Bible is the gift of God? and that God caused it to be written for this very purpose, that by it He might direct and support and comfort man in his journey through time to eternity? Do you not need direction and support and comfort? If you do, where else can you expect to find it? We are so accustomed to the sight of a Bible, that it ceases to be a miracle to us.

It is printed like other books, and we are apt to forget that it is not just like other books. But it is a treasure of unspeakable value, for it contains a special message of love and tender mercy from God to our soul.

Do you wish to converse with God? Open it and read. Look to Him who speaks to you in it, and ask Him to give you an understanding heart, that you may not read in vain, that the living Word, of which that written word is but the expression, may be *in* you, as good seed in good ground, bringing forth fruit unto eternal life. Take heed not to separate God from the Bible. Read it in the secret of His presence, receive it from His lips, and feed upon it; so will it become to you, as it did to Jeremiah, the very joy and rejoicing of your heart.

Let us seek to make ourselves acquainted with the Bible; but, in doing so, let us remember that, however much we may add by study to our knowledge of the book, we have just so much true knowledge of God as we have love, and no more. Our continual desire and prayer ought to be, that our true notions may become true feelings,

and that our orthodoxy and theology may produce in us holy love and holy obedience. Love is the religion of eternity; and the religion of eternity is the only religion for us, who are made in the image of the eternal God.

Men are apt to think that religion is but one of the many duties of life, and that it ought to have its own time and its own place like the others; and they set apart for it churches and Sundays and certain special occasions, and having done so, they seem to consider it an intruder if it appears out of these limits. But religion is not just one of the many duties of life; it is itself the life, through which alone all duty can be done.

As the sap of the root circulates through every branch and twig and leaf of the tree, so the love of God, which is the sap of this new spiritual root, ought to circulate through every thought and desire and action of the man. So far as a man is truly religious, he judges of everything by the light of God's will; and this will of God he gives as the reason of his judgment, whenever he is asked for his reason. Amongst those who, *not nominally, but really,* acknow-

ledge the authority of God, such a reason will be considered as the only good reason. God is not really acknowledged where His authority cannot be appealed to as a ground of judgment or of action.

Man's day, and the day of the Lord.

It is a small thing to me, says the apostle of the Gentiles, to be judged of you, or of man's day. The expression is remarkable—*man's day*. *This* is man's day; man now looks at things and judges of them by the light of his own self-will, and this way of judging passes current, and is little questioned. It was in man's day that the JUST ONE, the anointed of the Father, was rejected and condemned[1]—and those who judge according to man's day, do still continue to reject and condemn him. But there is another day coming—the day of the Lord,—and by its light all the judgments of man's day shall be judged. Man's judgments shall pass away with man's day; but the judgment of the Lord shall stand, for the day of the Lord is eternity.

We may live even now in the light of God's day, for the Sun of Righteousness has

[1] Luke xxii. 53.

arisen, and many rays of its heavenly light reach the conscience; the Bible is full of that light, and God answers prayer by the communications of it to our spirits. It shows things as they are, for it shows them as God sees them; and it shows things as they always will be, for it is the light of eternity. The man who lives in this light sees God to be the only satisfying portion of the soul, and chooses God for his own portion. He who lives in the light of man's day sees nothing but the perishing things of time as a portion, and can therefore choose no other.

Now mark these men, as death approaches them; the one feels that in leaving this world he is leaving his portion—all that he knows or dreams of as good—for ever; the other knows that he is entering on the full enjoyment of that portion which he has chosen here, and here tasted to be good, but which he cannot fully enjoy whilst encompassed with the body of his humiliation. All the thoughts of the one are about to perish; all the thoughts of the other are about to be accomplished.

Thus life and death are set before every man. God has made a general proclama-

tion of love and compassion to the whole race; and they who hear it rejoice for the consolation. He commands all men to believe that their sins are forgiven. Therefore St. John says that they who do not believe that God hath given us eternal life in his Son, make God a liar. God proclaims over the whole world, "Return unto me, ye backsliding children;" and every one who hears His voice answers, "I will arise and go to my Father."

God's free love requires absolute self-sacrifice on Man's part in order to take it in.

This proclamation of free unconditional mercy, manifested in the gift of Christ, is the blessed gospel of the grace of God; which "has appeared unto all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present evil world, looking for that blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of the great God, even our Saviour, Jesus Christ."

The gospel is a message of most free and unbounded love, and yet no message ever came to man which required him to make such sacrifices. But this is in the very nature of the thing. The receiver of a free and generous kindness cannot but feel him-

self required to respond to it by the sacrifice of self; and he will refuse the kindness, if he cannot make up his mind to the sacrifice. The heart which deliberately clings to *self* cannot for its very life receive or admit a generous and disinterested kindness. Self must be cast out, in order to admit the kindness. Its very baseness may enable it to receive an *act* of kindness, *a donation, an alms,* but it cannot receive the love which does *the kindness* without being changed into the same image—without becoming itself generous.

And so when the pardon of the gospel is supposed to be a mere removal of penalties and deliverance from torments, a man may catch at the pardon and keep his selfishness; but when it is seen to be the gift of infinite love—of wholly disinterested self-sacrificing love on the part of God, laid down at the door of man's heart, and waiting there with a patience which is grieved, but not exhausted by the madly pertinacious rejection which it meets with,—when it is seen to be the gift of God's own heart, the gift of Himself to His poor prodigals, His apostate children—no man can receive it and continue selfish. The very sight of such love

compels him to sell all and buy it, to surrender himself and cast out all besides, that he may make room for the reception of this overwhelming, annihilating, unrepayable love. Such love, if realized, would be perfect torture to any one who did not submit himself with grateful humility, who did not recognise God as the only and necessary and perpetual Giver, and himself as only a receiver. But the great practical difficulty is to *realize* it. This love of God, this eternal embrace of the Father of our spirits, *when once seen*, appears so glorious, so subduing, so attractive, that, until by bitter experience we learn the deceitfulness of our own hearts, we can scarcely conceive the possibility of our ever forgetting God for a moment. But deep humiliation is the lesson which man has to learn in this world. He has to be taught his own weakness, and his own utter incapacity to produce or maintain in himself the feeling of common gratitude to God, without the continued supply of divine grace. He has to learn that he can be nothing but a receiver —that his only strength consists in the strength of God communicated to him from moment to moment—that he has nothing of

his own which is good, and *never will have;* and that his spiritual perfection and blessedness consist in his being a receiver of God—of God's life and love and light,—in his being a branch on the true vine, and not a plant on his own root. Let him then live in the spirit of dependence and the spirit of prayer, listening to that word, "Abide in me."

Every event from God is gracious in its purpose.

The apostle James says, "Count it all joy when you fall into divers trials, for the trial of your faith *giveth it endurance;*" that is, works the Divine principle into the very substance of the mind.

This is surely the great purpose of our Father in His providential dealings. *Not* a sparrow falleth to the ground without God, and not an event happens without a particular reference to the state and character of the person to whom it happens. We have thus, every day of our lives, many direct and special messages from God to our souls, and surely we show Him small respect if we treat His messages as trifling things. They are full of importance, they are opportunities given to us of dying to self, and living to God, and holding communion with Him. In

every one of them God is saying, "Seek ye my face," and we ought to be ever ready with our answer, "Thy face, Lord, will we seek." With what an awakenedness of attention should we live, if we *really* believed that every event is a voice from God, and an opportunity of dying to self! My dear reader, allow me to repeat this to you. Every event that happens to ourselves or those around us, strengthens either the love of God or the principle of self within us; because on every event we exercise our judgment or our feelings, and this we must do either according to the will of God, or according to our own will.

Thus we can never stand still for a moment; there is no rest from the conflict; we are continually taking part either with God or against Him. There are but two ways in which man can walk towards eternity—the narrow way which leads to life, or the broad way which leads to destruction. The first is the way of self-forgetting and God-pleasing; the second is the way of self-pleasing and God-forgetting. In one or other of these ways every man is walking. He is either resisting self or he is not. He may be doing nothing absolutely wrong,

according to the world's estimate of duty; but unless he is on principle denying himself, and taking up his cross daily, he *cannot be* Christ's disciple; for there is no room for Christ's love in a heart which refuses to give up self.

Oh! if we felt as we ought that that only is good which draws us near to God, and that self is indeed the great bar which divides us from God, and keeps us at a distance from Him, how entirely should we be reconciled to those events which cross and thwart the principle of self, seeing that they weaken the bar which separates us from God, our only real good; we should then know that there is no evil but sin, and that everything God sends must be a blessing, if received in the spirit of that prayer which says, "Not my will, O God, but Thine be done!"

We are apt to lay our own faults upon events, and to think that if our circumstances had been more favourable, as we call it, we should have been more religious, or more peaceful, or more spiritually minded. The apostle James meets all such complaints in this way:—"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any

man, but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren," in this matter; "*every appointment is gracious in its intention, and divinely fitted for its purpose*, seeing that it cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."[1] Practical religion consists in seeing God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in everything, and in expecting a blessing from Him in everything, and in

[1] It seems to me quite clear that the apostle does not mean to say, as translators in general have supposed, that *every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.* No one is disposed to question this; and, besides, it makes nothing at all for the argument which he is holding. He had said, that we ought to count it all joy when we fall into divers trials, because the trial of our faith increases its strength. Then he supposes some one objecting,—Yes, but there are events, which, by leading us into sin, weaken instead of strengthening our faith. It evidently would be no answer to such an objection to say, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above;" for the objector might reply, "I have no doubt of that; *but the bad gifts*—the events which lead me into sin—come from above also, or at least are not prevented from coming by the Power above; and it is of these bad gifts that I am speaking at present, and not of the good ones." The true interpretation of

being more concerned as to the spiritual improvement which we may draw from every event that befalls us, than as to the nature of the event itself being either agreeable or disagreeable to us; *in other words, it consists in the spirit of dependence.*

Affliction is a great realizer,—or rather a great detector of the want of reality—in religion. We perhaps thought ourselves Christians, and that we were founded on the rock; and now affliction comes, and we shake like aspen leaves. Could this be if we were really on the rock? We thought

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the apostle's words precisely meets this objection. There are *no* bad gifts, *no* bad events, "*every appointment is gracious in its design, and divinely fitted for that design. All* events are fitted for exercising and strengthening the faith of those to whom they are sent, and they have been selected by infinite love and infinite wisdom for this object. Man may neglect or misuse them; but let him not presume to say, I am tempted of God;" he is himself to blame; he may have cast away an opportunity of growing for heaven, he may have converted a blessing into a curse, but the appointment itself was wise and gracious. The natural sun sends forth wholesome warmth in his beams; the diseased state of the object on which his beams alight may convert that wholesome warmth into fever or putrefaction, yet in itself it is a wholesome warmth. Even so, the beams of the Sun of Righteonsness may be turned to evil by the diseased heart of man, and yet there is nothing but love in God.

fondly that God was the chosen portion of our souls, and that though all created things were taken from us, we had enough when we had Him; and yet when He crosses some desire of our hearts, or removes some of His own gifts—health, it may be, or a friend, or even a little of "this world's good,"—we seem as if we had lost our all, and cry after it, as that Danite did after his idols; and thus we learn the fact, that our former comfort did not, as we idly supposed, flow from the eternal fountain (for that still remains to us), but had been drawn from perishing cisterns, seeing that now when they are broken we die of thirst. This is an important discovery, and it is to make this discovery to us that God sends affliction. Let us then receive it in deep humility, let us receive it as a call from God to leave the creature behind us and go directly into His own more immediate presence, into His inner chamber.

Reader, will you allow me to speak a word to you on this matter? Beware of occupying your mind as to how the affliction happened, or how it might have been prevented. Think not of the oversight or folly or malice which may appear to you to

have been the immediate occasion of it. *God did it;* and you must bid away all second causes from your thought, and carry the affliction to His throne of grace, and cast it and yourself before Him. Ask Him to deliver you from resting on any created portion, and pray Him to become Himself your real, true, and everlasting portion. Take heed that this affliction be not lost. *Abide* in His presence, and be jealous of receiving comfort from any other source. *You may lose your affliction if you do.* And oh! remember that holiness is of more importance than comfort; and be more anxious for profit from your affliction than for deliverance from it. You are an immortal creature, and eternity is your great concern. Holiness is *eternal* blessedness; comfort may be the affair of an hour. And God sends affliction that we may become partakers of His holiness.

Let me conclude by saying that everything is to be looked for and received from God. "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it." It is the soul that receives *all* from God, which alone can feel itself to be the property of God—His property to guide and to command, His property to bless and to

keep, His highly-prized property, purchased at no less a cost than the death of Christ, for this very end—that He might sanctify it in time and glorify it in eternity. The soul which feels this has peace; it does not make haste, for it knows how secure it is; it possesses the secret of the Lord, that secret which suffices for all circumstances and contingencies—for life—for death—for duty—for suffering; which gives the spirit of a pilgrim and yet a willing servant; which gives a foretaste of the joy of heaven, inasmuch as it is the commencement of the character of heaven.

CHAPTER VII.

Consistency between Present Forgiveness and Future Judgment.

Life the end of the gospel, pardon only the means.

THE great truth which I have been trying to press upon my readers is, that neither forgiveness of sin nor deliverance from punishment is the great and ultimate blessing which God intends for man in the work of Christ. That, in fact, the forgiveness of sin is only a preparatory step, as it were, to the great blessing, which consists in becoming "the habitations of God through the Spirit" —in being "turned away every one of us from our iniquities"—in being "holy and without blame before God in love"—"in having eternal life" (Ephesians ii. 22; i. 4. Acts iii. 26; John iii. 17).

No creature can have any real goodness in it except in so far as it is dwelt in by God; or, in other words, in so far as it is the habi-

tation of God through the Spirit. None is good save One, that is God—and the creature can be good only by being in-dwelt by Him. But how is the creature to attain this state? It cannot draw down God into itself —it is weakness. How then is the object to be accomplished? In order to answer this question, we have only to see how man fell at first. God had told him, that if he sought for happiness elsewhere than in the provision which He had made for him, he would find death instead of life. The devil told him, that instead of death, he would find great advancement by doing so, and thus suggested that God's prohibition did not proceed from love, but from grudging. As soon as Adam disbelieved God's love, his heart shut against God. Before this,—whilst he had full confidence in God's love,—his heart stood ever wide open to God, and as we live, and move, and have our being in Him, his ever open heart was ever receiving God into it—and thus he continued good with God's own goodness, until his heart was closed by disbelief. Then he ceased to have any goodness in him, or true life or true blessedness, for he had shut out the love, and the life, and the blessedness of God.

By this act, though he did not destroy God's love, he yet changed his own relation to it. God's is a love which rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; therefore it could not rejoice in a creature which had shut out the truth. The love of God in such circumstances, could not be *favour*, for He regardeth only the righteous with favour; and it is in His *favour* that there is *life*. A righteous barrier was raised by sin between God and man. As man had shut out God, so he was shut out from that "favour of God" in which alone there "is life." But God's love still yearned over man, and desired again to embrace him with *favour*, that he might live; and to this end He sent forth his Son, who is "the truth" into the human nature, to become the head of the nature, and to fulfil all righteousness as its head; that so that loving favour in which there is life and which rejoiceth only in the truth, might again rejoice with man, and embrace the human race. This is the work of Christ in the flesh. God now sees truth in the human nature, for He sees Jesus in it, and therefore His love can rejoice in it. "He hath made of one blood all the nations of the earth," and Jesus has taken that one blood

Not God's mind, but man's relation to God, changed by sin.

and offered it up pure—he has entered into the one flesh, and yet remains in it, and shall remain in it for ever; and in him, as the head of this one flesh, is lodged the fulness of the Spirit; as the life-blood which circulates through the whole body wherever it can find access, that is, wherever it finds a heart opened to God. Now this opening of the human heart to let in the life-blood, can only be produced by a belief in forgiveness. Until a man believes that his sins are forgiven, his heart necessarily remains closed, for he cannot have confidence in God till then. We cannot have confidence in any one who, we think, regards us with unforgiveness; and it is confidence alone which opens the heart. Therefore, so long as a man refuses to believe in forgiveness, so long does he refuse access to the Spirit of God into his heart.

If the condemnation is not actually removed, there can be no ground for confidence in God, and so there can be no way of obtaining that life which is the favour of God. But we are now, to say the least of it (and far indeed it is below the truth), in as favourable a condition as Adam was before the fall. He had not to create or call forth the

favour of God, but had merely to rejoice in a favour which ever rested on him, and to receive it into him as his life; and even so we have not to create or call forth the forgiving love of God (in which alone there is life for a sinner), but to rejoice in that forgiving love which in Christ ever rests upon us, and so to receive it into us as our life.

And as there is no inconsistency between the love and favour which rested on Adam before the fall, and the judgment which condemned him after the fall for rejecting that love and favour which had been resting on him—so there is no inconsistency between the forgiveness which is now resting upon every man during this dispensation of grace, and the judgment which at its close will condemn those who shall be found to have rejected that forgiving favour which had been resting on them.

Adam was called on to rejoice in the love of God—this was his life—and this he could not have done, unless that love had been resting upon him. The condemnation of sin consists in not being permitted to rejoice in the love of God—and so the word of condemnation in the day of judgment is "*depart*"—that

is, you are no longer permitted to rejoice in God's love, you have separated yourself from it. Nothing short of this is condemnation; for surely no creature can be said to be under condemnation that is still permitted and called on to rejoice in the love of God. Into this true condemnation Adam fell by his apostasy, and out of it he was delivered by the seed of the woman, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. The deliverance from this condemnation through the forgiveness of sins, is the permission again to rejoice in the love of God—the permission again to drink out of the fountain of God, which is love and life. Now we know that throughout this dispensation, the word of God to every man is, "*Come* unto me all ye that labour." "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come to the waters." "Rejoice in the Lord always." And one of the condemning sins of Israel was, "because they served not the Lord with gladness."

But this forgiving love which rests on every man during this dispensation, is so far from opposing the coming judgment, that it is actually the ground of that judgment,—just as the love which rested on Adam before the fall was the ground of his

subsequent condemnation. We have the permission to drink out of God's love, *in order that we may so drink.* We are permitted to rejoice in God, in order that our hearts may be filled with Him. And thus those who are not led by the forgiveness of sin to drink out of God and to rejoice in His love, frustrate the counsel of God against themselves, and when the dispensation of judgment arrives, they shall be condemned for having so done.

"Return unto me, *for I have redeemed you*" (Isaiah xliv. 22), is the true preaching of repentance, for repentance and returning are one thing, and no man was ever called on—or could ever be called on—to return on any other terms. And this is the condemnation, that men "deny the Lord who has bought them, and thus bring upon themselves swift destruction"(2 Peter ii. 1).

Christ is "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world" (John i. 29), and thus he is "the light of the world" (John i. 9), for until the forgiveness of sin is known all is darkness; until then every step which a man takes is in darkness; "And this is the condemnation, that the light hath come into the world, and men

have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil" (John iii. 19). Thus we see that the condemnation of God is grounded on man's rejection of forgiving love. "Despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance, but after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up for thyself wrath against the day of wrath (the coming dispensation of judgment), and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds?"[1] This last expression is evidently taken from the last verse of Psalm lxii., in which psalm the speaker, who is none other than the Divine Son (verse 7), confesses God as his salvation and glory, the rock of his strength and his refuge. And then this true Truster calls on all people, (verse 8), to trust in this God, who is as much *their* refuge as *his*, and warns them (verses 9 and 10), against trusting either in other men, or in their own strength or riches; then he sums up the reasons for putting our trust in God, in these words, "*power* belong-

[1] Rom. ii. 4.

eth unto God, also unto Thee, O God, belongeth *mercy.*" And having placed before men the two principles—of trust in God and trust in the creature, with their consequences, he thus concludes:—"Thou renderest to every man according to his works," that is, according to his trust, the *trust* being the principle of action; he who trusts in God acts according to God—he who trusts in the flesh, or the creature, acts according to its suggestions. If the *mercy* of God to every man is denied, then the scriptural ground of *judgment* on every man is also denied.

The righteous Judge is coming to judge and to reign; and the voice which has been sent forth into this wilderness before him, to prepare his way, is the proclamation of the remission of sins through his blood; this was the preaching of John the Baptist; he called on men—not to repent, *in order to have their sins remitted,* but—to repent, or to turn the eye of their soul to the truth of a forgiveness *already bestowed*;[1] and the belief of this message is always indispensable, in order to prepare the heart to welcome the coming King.

[1] See Acts xix. 4; x. 36; xiii. 36, 48.

Reader, farewell. I believe that what I have written is according to the word of God; and as far as it is so, I may look up to Him for a blessing on it. It would be an unspeakable joy to me to have any reason to think, that it has been really honoured by Him to be the bearer of a message to your soul. At all events, I trust it may not do you the injury of exciting the spirit in you of controversy. If you don't agree with it, lay it down and go to the Bible; and if you do agree with it, in like manner lay it down and go to the Bible, and go in the spirit of prayer to Him whose word the Bible is, and ask of Him, and He will lead you into all truth—He will give you living water.

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